SPECIAL TIME EDITION

THE MAGIC OF LEGO

The Toy That Changed the World

Simple Idea, Endless Possibilities

The Bricks, The Minifigures, The Movies, The Superfans

SPECIAL TIME EDITION

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CONTENTS

4 75 Years of Infinite Possibilities

8 The Most Ambitious Sets

THE LEGO STORY

18 **Brick by Brick**
How a resilient Danish woodworker created a toy empire.

34 **Legoland**
Where Lego comes to life.

36 **Life in Miniature**
Bringing personality to Lego's little people.

40 **Creating New Worlds**
Storytelling to enhance playtime.

42 **Learning with Lego**
Fostering creativity and cognitive skills.

FROM BRICK TO SCREEN

50 **Box Office Bricktacular**
Everything was awesome with *The Lego Movie*.

58 **The Lego Cinematic Universe**
The sequels and spinoffs.

64 **A Force Awakens**
A partnership of galactic proportions with Star Wars.

70 **A Pop Culture Powerhouse**
Lego takes on Marvel, the Lord of the Rings, and more.

THE FANDOM

82 **Building a Following**
How superfans have become social media stars.

86 **Masters of the Lego Domain**
A TV showcase for audacious builders.

88 **Fan Creations Come to Life**
Everyday builders shoot for store shelves.

96 **A Towering Tribute**
A monumental memorial to a young fan.

Since the 1970s, Lego minifigures have put a playful face on the toy giant.

Almost all Lego pieces and bricks are designed to be compatible with one another across various sets and product lines.

75 YEARS OF INFINITE POSSIBILITIES

In 1949, Lego revolutionized the toy industry, and millions of imaginations, by introducing little bricks that allow for structured play and spontaneous creativity—often simultaneously.

BY RICHARD JEROME

AT FIRST GLANCE, THEY MIGHT SEEM UNREMARKable. A bunch of small, brightly colored plastic rectangles—bricks, they're called. You could pass them by without a second thought in the toy aisle of your local department store. Or maybe you'd roll your eyes trying to step over them as they lay strewn on the floor at the home of a relative with small children. Just kid stuff, like crayons or those blocks with the letters of the alphabet on them. But these little plastic bricks are the centerpiece of an international juggernaut that has revolutionized the world of play and expanded the minds of generations of children and adults alike: Lego.

Named for an amalgam of the Danish phrase for "play well," the Lego Group launched in 1932 under founder Ole Kirk Christiansen—a carpenter from Billund, Denmark—as a maker of wooden toys. The bricks were first manufactured and marketed in 1949. They're part of a unique and ingenious system. Tiny tubes inside give the knobs atop other blocks more places to grip. They hold together well, but a child can take them apart easily. Sounds simple enough—deceptively so. For the magic of Lego Bricks is that, because of their design, they allow for virtually limitless creativity.

A few years ago, mathematician Soren Eilers of the University of Copenhagen calculated that half a dozen of those standard 4x2-inch plastic rectangles can be used in almost 1 billion different combinations—915,103,765, to be precise. Houses and buildings from every architectural period in every conceivable style; whole towns and cities; planes,

The original Legoland amusement bark in Billund, Denmark, remains a major tourist attraction (right). Nearby is the Lego House (above), an interactive attraction for all ages. Below: Playing with Lego can help children learn about creativity and cooperation.

trains, and automobiles; furniture and jewelry.

"To really understand Lego's impact, you have to consider construction toys at the time of their introduction," says Tim Walsh, an author, inventor and YouTube toy historian. "Wooden structures were possible to build with ubiquitous wooden blocks but not very stable. More elaborate structures were possible with Tinker Toys and Lincoln Logs, but the step up was not significant. Very elaborate structures were possible with Erector sets but tedious to build and take apart. It took a few years to eliminate the warping and cracking that typified early Lego bricks, but once perfected, they gave kids all the ease of building with wooden blocks, Tinker Toys, and Lincoln Logs, with all the elaborate possibility of Erector sets, and at a significantly lower price. And in terms of open-ended play, Lego is unparalleled, in that it offers specific goal-oriented sets to complete in 'model building' fashion *and* the opportunity to combine sets to create virtually endless possibilities in terms of creation."

Small wonder Britain's Toy Retailers Association voted Lego the Toy of the Century in 2000. "It's hard to imagine a bigger impact in terms of a toy shaping us and in turn, our culture," observes Walsh. "Perhaps only Barbie and Frisbee come to mind. I don't think it's possible to determine how many architects and engineers found their bliss and eventually their profession because of this toy. It's staggering."

Like all products and businesses, Lego has experienced peaks and valleys, good years and lean, subject to the forces of global history and economics. The company has almost always adapted. There are the Legoland theme parks, and a Lego film franchise.

“It’s hard to imagine a bigger impact in terms of a toy shaping us and, in turn, our culture. Perhaps only Barbie and Frisbee come to mind.”

–TOY HISTORIAN TIM WALSH

And while the internet revolution might have overwhelmed Lego’s old-school brick-and-mortar aesthetic, thus far the company has managed digital transformation deftly, launching mobile apps based on kids’ favorite Lego themes, smart companion apps that allow users to control real-life models and robots, and Lego Life, a secure social media platform for children.

Still, for all the tech razzle-dazzle, with Lego, it always comes back to the bricks.

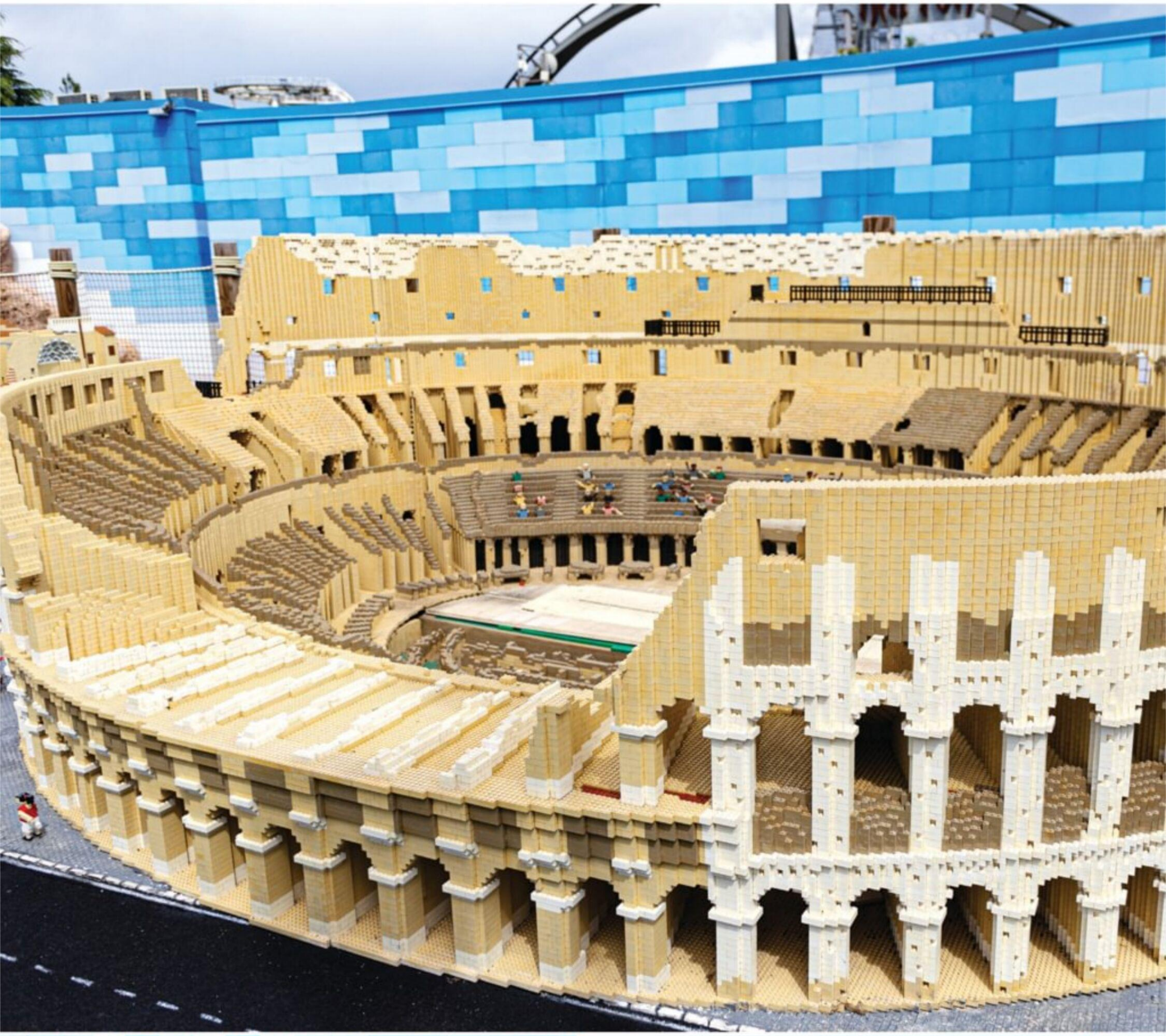
“They just feel good in your hands,” Walsh says. “They feel good when they connect, and even when they’re pulled apart. And of course, visually speaking, Lego’s wooden and metal forerunners didn’t stand a chance. All those brightly colored bricks were like Dorothy opening the door to her bedroom once she landed in Oz.” □

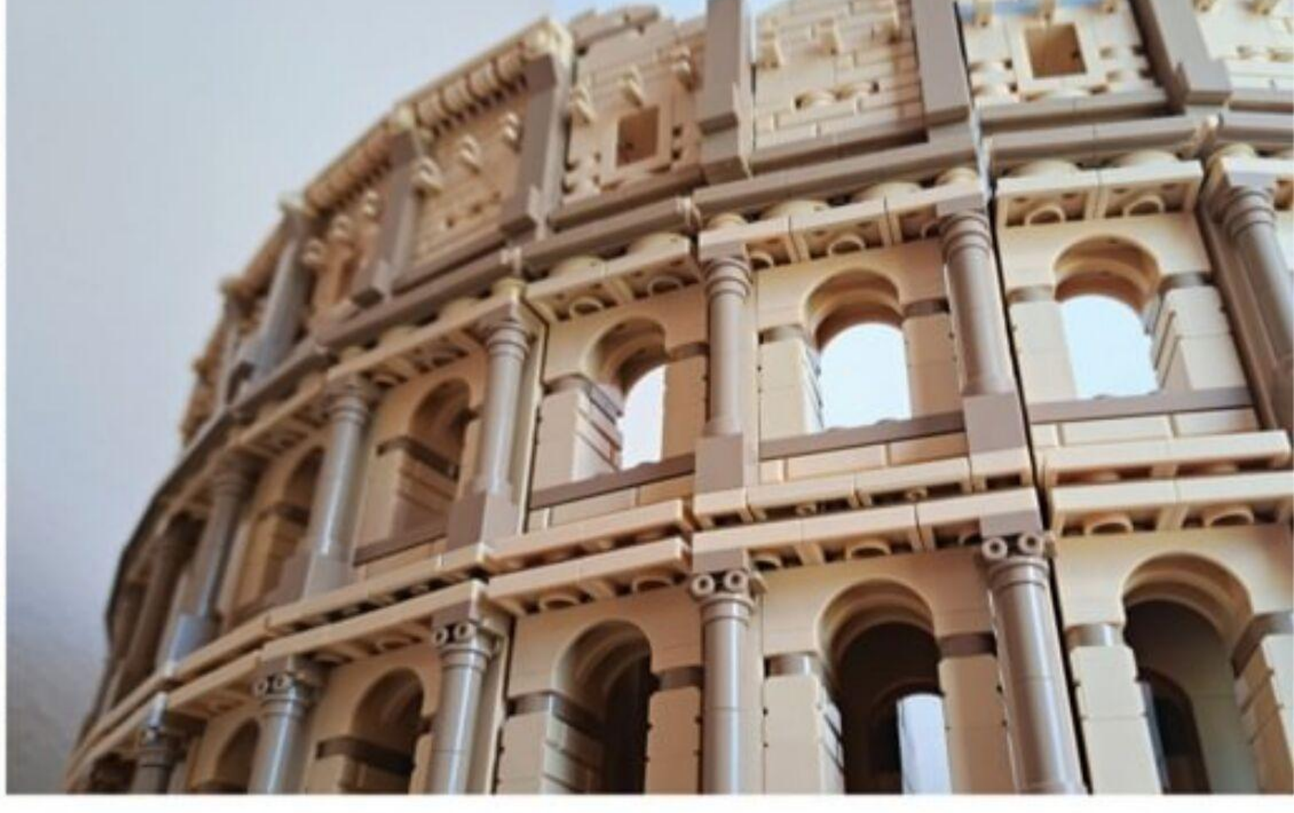
Taj Mahal

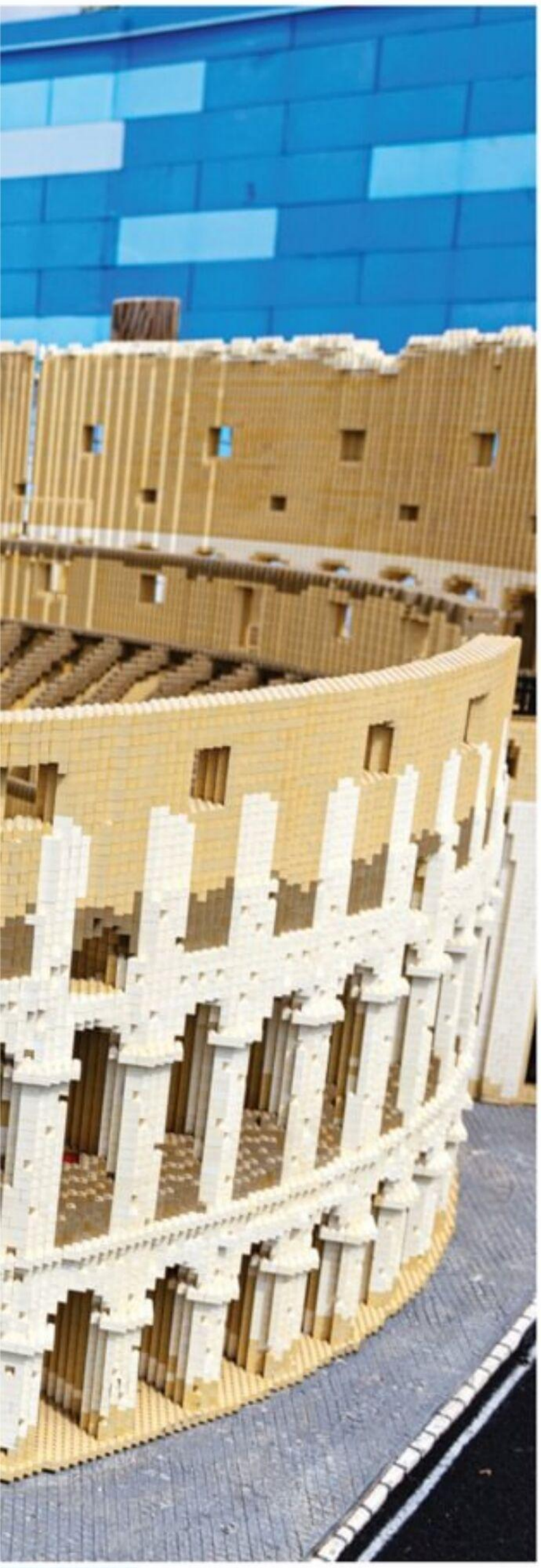
Debuting in 2008 and then updated in 2017, this 5,922-piece re-creation of the sacred 17th-century Indian mausoleum stands 17 inches tall and 20 inches wide and has seven modular sections. At the time of its original release, it was the largest Lego set to date.

THE MOST AMBITIOUS SETS

They're composed of thousands of pieces, and they require time and patience to build. And by and large, they're spectacular.







Colosseum

Part of the Creator Expert line, this adaptation of the famed ancient Roman amphitheater was released in 2020. With 9,036 pieces, the set not only features the structure's iconic exterior details, such as archways and walkways, but also the underground areas.

Eiffel Tower

Ooh la la! The tallest Lego set at just under five feet, this 2022 replica is made up of 10,001 pieces. Most of them are gray, which adds to the challenge. The finished structure is so impressive, a version stands on display at the Legoland near the company's headquarters in Billund, Denmark (pictured).

Alex BrickMan
LE NAUFRAGE :
TITANIC

Titanic

Almost four and a half feet long, this 9,090-piece kit revisits the doomed ocean liner. The 2021 set can be displayed in three sections to allow for an interior view of the detailed build, including staterooms, staircases, and the engine. Clever builders have also figured out how to display the ship as it sank (pictured).

Millennium Falcon

You might not want to take on this one, Solo. While there have been several versions of the signature Star Wars spaceship, the 2017 Ultimate Collectors Series version clocks in at 7,541 pieces, setting the standard for ambition. The instruction booklet has 466 pages, with 1,379 steps. The set includes minifigure versions of the crew from the original and sequel trilogies, including two of Han Solo, and the notorious holographic chess table where Chewbacca and R2-D2 faced off in the first movie. Looking for something a little less daunting? A 2019 version had a mere 1,353 pieces.

Hogwarts Castle

Harry Potter's alma mater has been given the Lego treatment many times, most ambitiously in 2018 with this 6,020-piece build, complete with the Chamber of Secrets, Hagrid's hut, and the Whomping Willow. Four minifigures—Hogwarts founders Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Salazar Slytherin, and Rowena Ravenclaw—are included, plus smaller figures of Harry, Hermione, Ron, and company.

CHAPTER 1

THE LEGO STORY

The resilient toy company has transformed the way kids (and adults) play, thanks to an empire built on creativity.

One of Lego's earliest initiatives was the Town Plan, where children could create a community, including this gas station from 1978.

BRICK BY BRICK

From a humble start in rural Denmark, and thanks to constant innovation and risk-taking, Lego has built itself into one of the world's most successful toy companies.

BY RICHARD JEROME

AT THE AGE OF 6 IN 1897, OLE KIRK CHRISTIANSEN was a farmhand—like his father, Jens—tending to sheep and cows, cleaning stables on the edge of Billund, Denmark, a deeply religious rural South Jutland community of about 100 inhabitants. One of 13 children, Ole Kirk grew up undeniably poor, though his parents made sure he received a basic high school education, which amounted to two days of class a week. The youngster, however, was far more interested in working with his hands than in hitting the books—or looking after barnyard animals. In between his farm chores, Ole Kirk whiled away time whittling wood. That presaged his career. At 14, he began to work as an apprentice carpenter and joiner for his brother, Kristian; after six years, Ole Kirk performed mandatory military service as an infantryman at the Citadel in Copenhagen. Once discharged, armed with his certificate of apprenticeship, he set off for the life of a journeyman.

In 1916, Ole Kirk, not yet 20, settled in Billund, which in those days consisted of a handful of small farms and shops, a blacksmith, an inn, a mission hall, a school, and a joinery factory. That year, he married Kristine Sørensen (they would have four sons: Johannes, Karl Georg, Godtfred—who would grow up to run the Lego Group—and Gerhardt); Ole Kirk also took a leap and purchased Billund Maskinsnedkeri (Billund Woodworking and Carpentry Shop) for 10,000 Danish krone (DKK), equivalent to about U.S. $1,500 in 2024. The woodworking shop produced a range of items, including doors, windows, kitchen cabinets, cupboards, agricultural tools—and coffins. A stickler for craftsmanship, Ole Kirk branched out to more ambitious projects—houses, farm buildings, the dairy at Billund and at Randbøl, mission halls, and a new gallery for Grene Church.

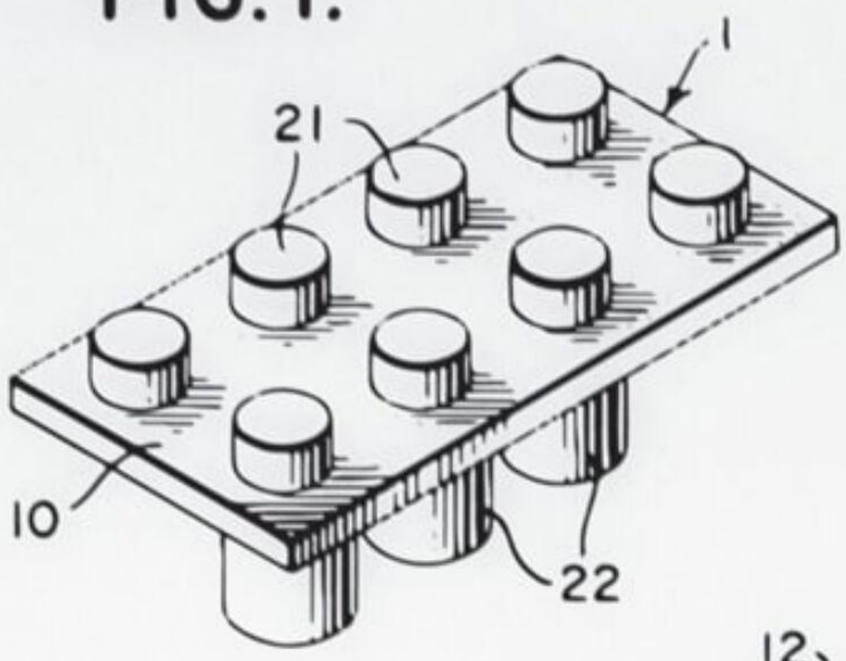
Ole Kirk quickly became active in Billund community affairs, known for his piety, work ethic, and

Oct. 24, 1961 G. K. CHRISTIANSEN 3,005,282

TOY BUILDING BRICK

Filed July 28, 1958 2 Sheets-Sheet 1

FIG. 1.



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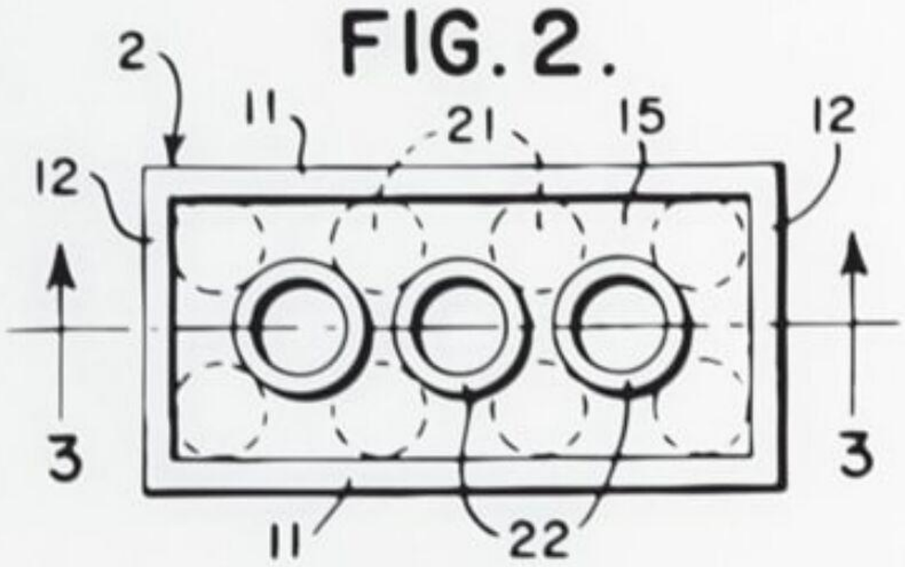

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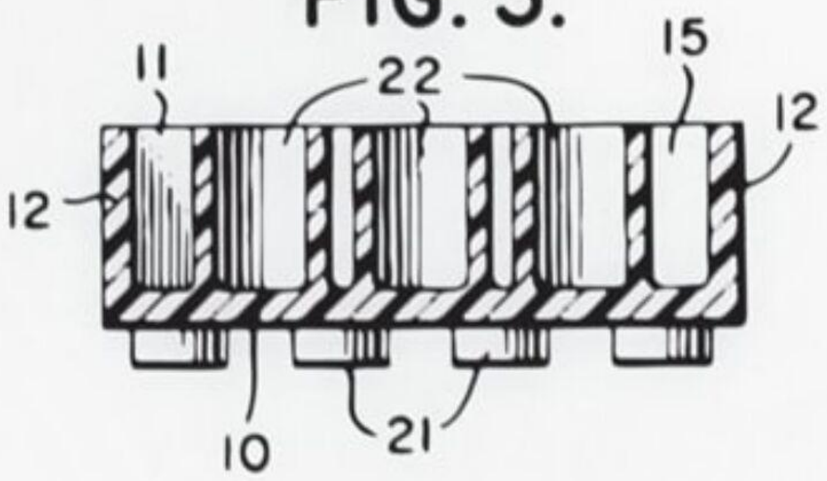

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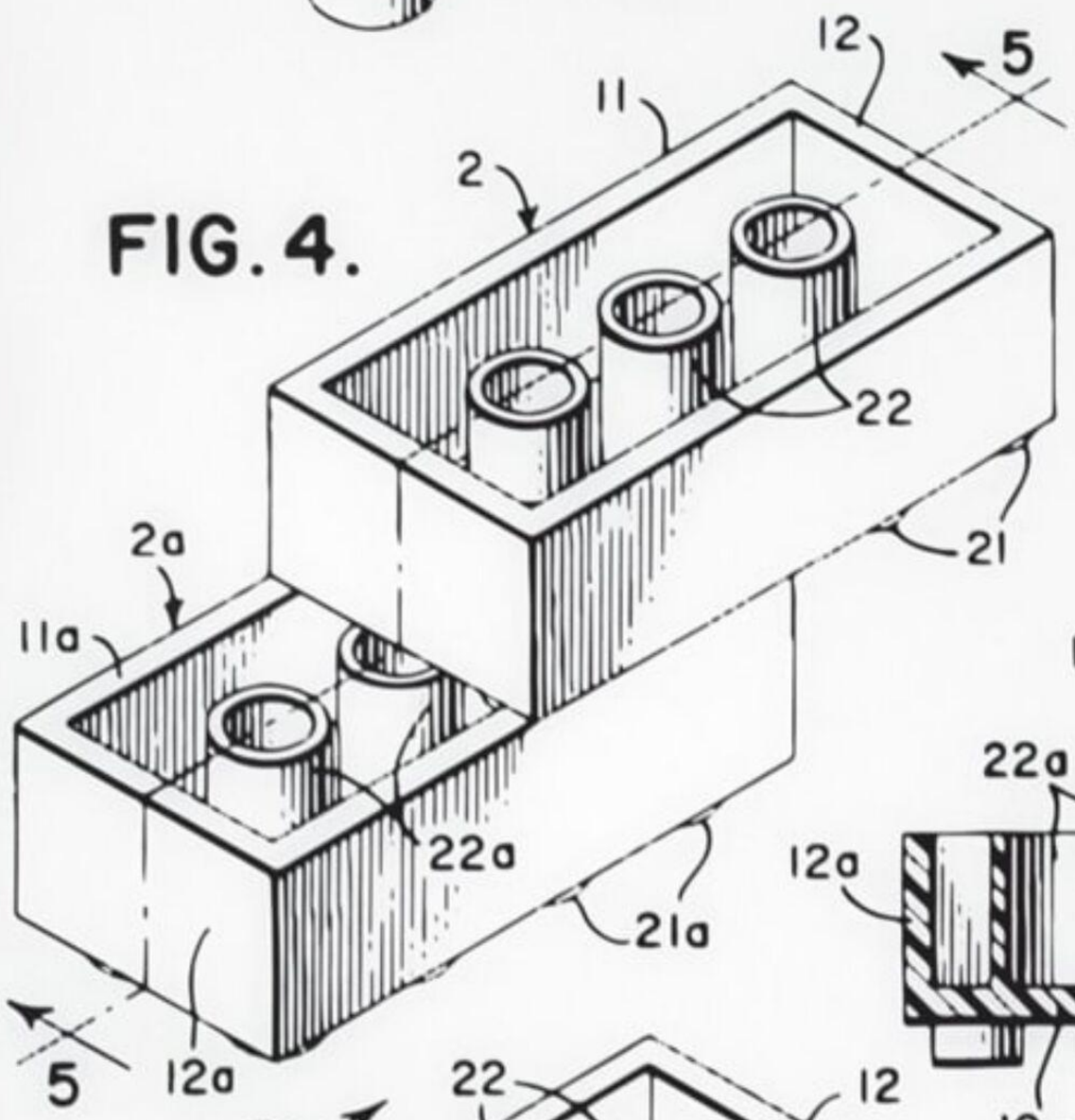

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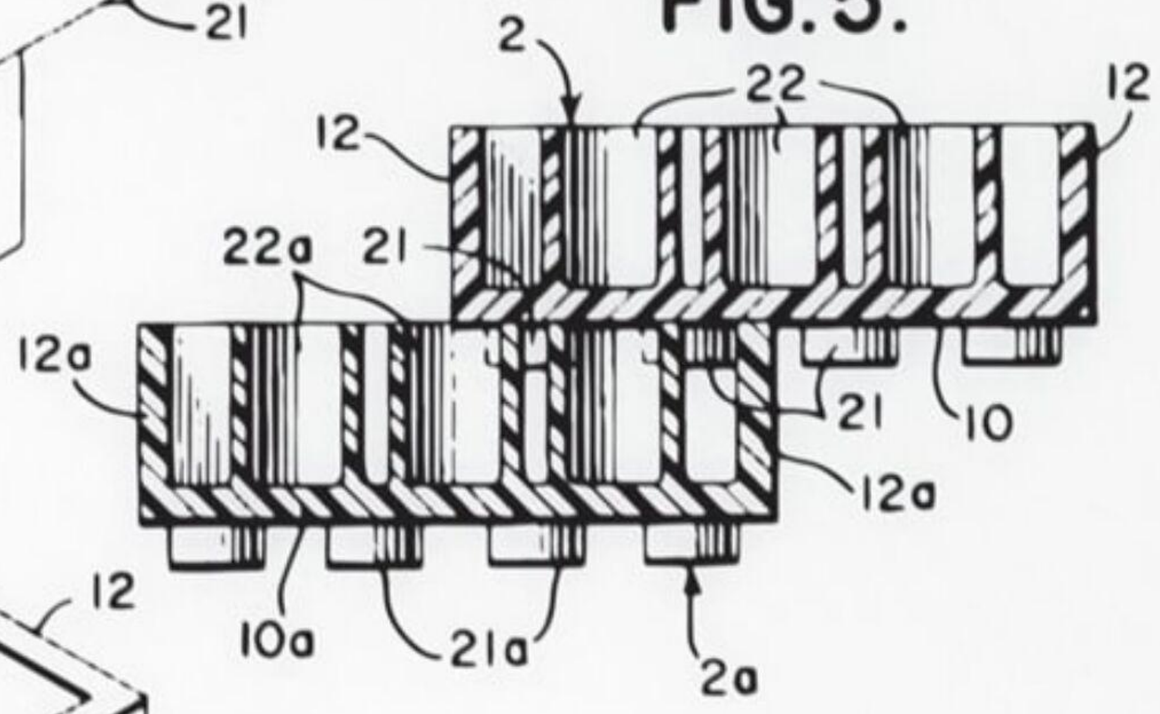

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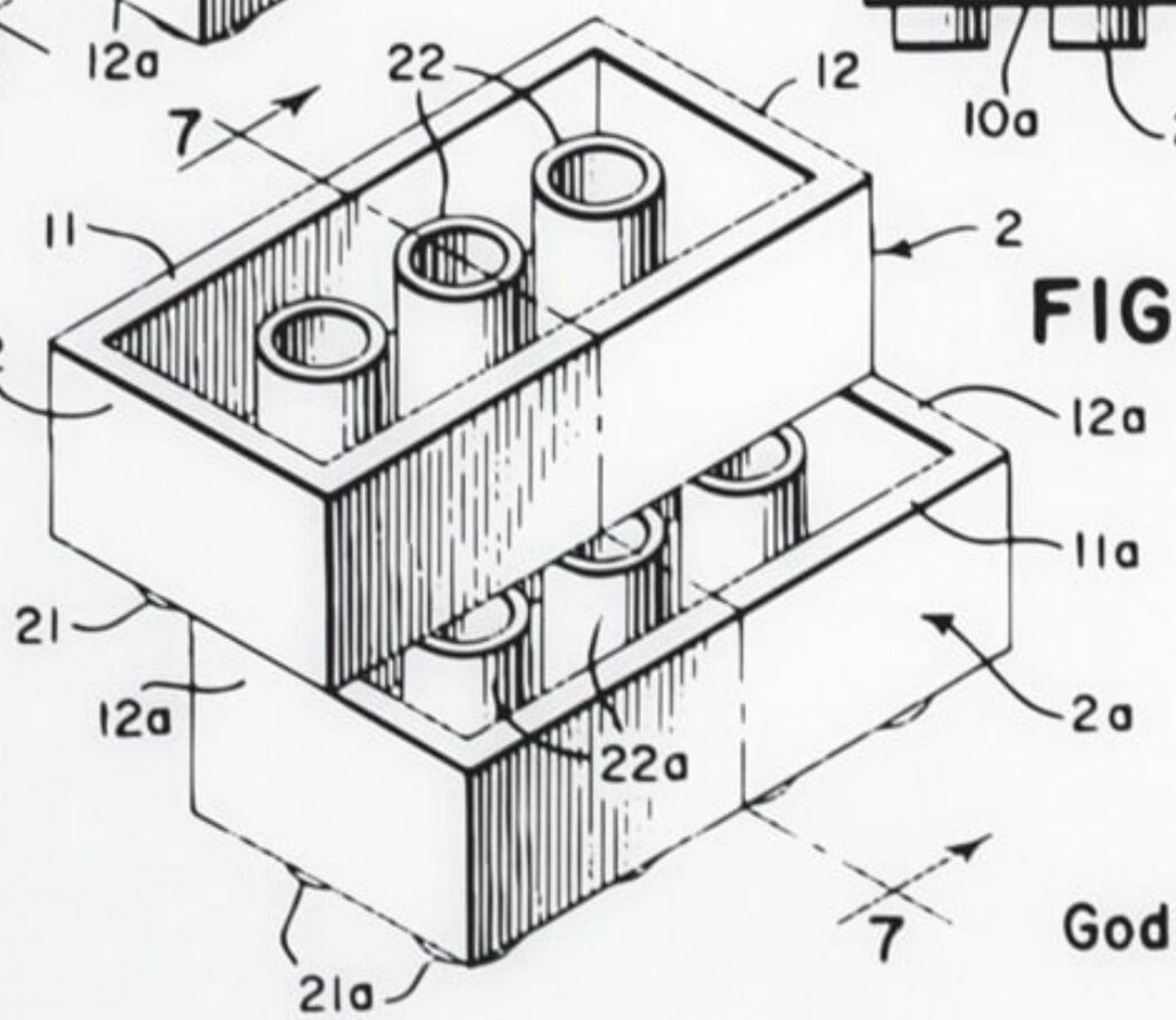


An original patent for Lego's interlocking bricks. Opposite: An early Lego building set from Germany, the company's first international market.

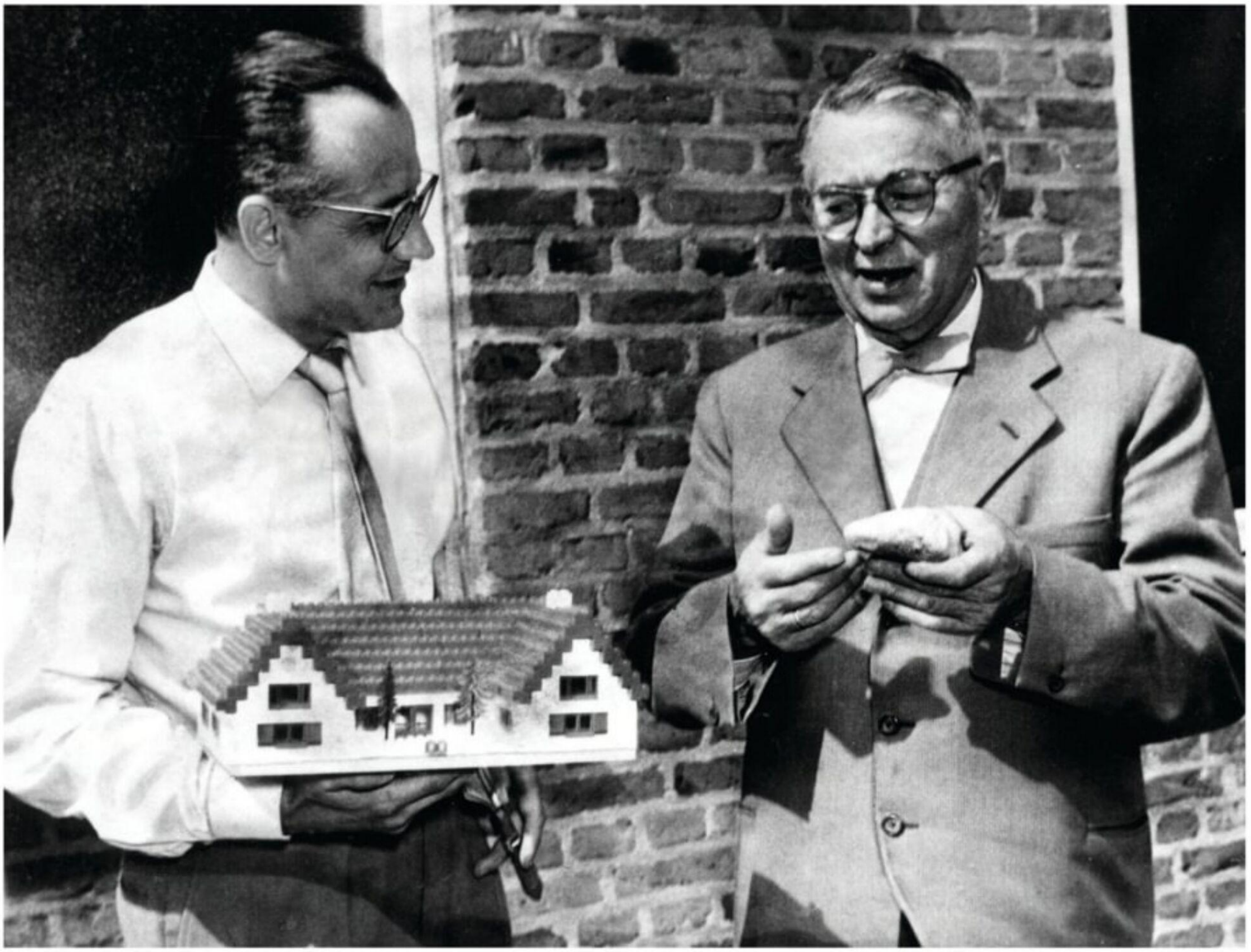
INVENTOR

Godtfred Kirk Christiansen

BY

Stevens, Davis, Miller & Mosher

ATTORNEYS



Lego founder Ole Kirk Christiansen (above right) handed the reins of the company to his son Godtfred Kirk Christiansen in 1957. Godtfred developed the system by which Lego bricks from all sets were compatible. Opposite: Some of Ole Kirk Christiansen's original woodworking tools on display in Billund.

unpretentious nature. He was a familiar figure at the Mission Hall, where he gave back by teaching handicrafts at the local school. Ole Kirk's devout Christian faith was put to the test on April 27, 1924. While he and his wife were taking an afternoon nap, their 5-year-old son Karl Georg and his year-younger brother Godtfred were playing in their father's workshop. The boys were trying to light a fire in the glue heater and accidentally also ignited a pile of wood shavings. Flames swiftly engulfed the building—and ultimately burned both the Christiansens' home and Ole Kirk's workshop to the ground.

Unbowed, Ole Kirk built back better. He commissioned prominent architect Jesper Jespersen to design a new home. Still known as "Ole Kirk's house," the Christiansens' new dwelling featured well-composed facades, front dormers, a hipped pitched roof, and a finely wrought main door. To finish things off, Ole Kirk laid the first concrete sidewalk in Billund and placed the sculpted figures of two lions sitting guard on either side of the front entrance.

In October 1929, the Wall Street crash sent markets around the Western world reeling as both industry and agriculture struggled to survive. In Billund, the price of butter and bacon plummeted, causing many farmers to go under. That, in turn, seriously impacted Ole Kirk Christiansen, drastically reducing his clientele as farmers and small-holders, if they survived at all, found they couldn't afford the kind of fine carpentry work that was his specialty. By 1931, Christiansen had laid off his last journeyman. "I [had] looked to the future with hope," he would write in his memoirs. "But within two months, my world was tumbling."

Indeed, 1932 brought a tragedy far worse than any business reverse. While pregnant with their fifth child, Kristine fell ill, suffered a miscarriage, seemed to rally, but then died at age 40 after an attack of phlebitis. The swift and sudden blow natu-

rally shattered Ole Kirk. "I remember him coming into the front room, where I was playing around on the organ, and he told us what had happened," Godtfred, then 12, recalled. "That was the first time I saw my father cry."

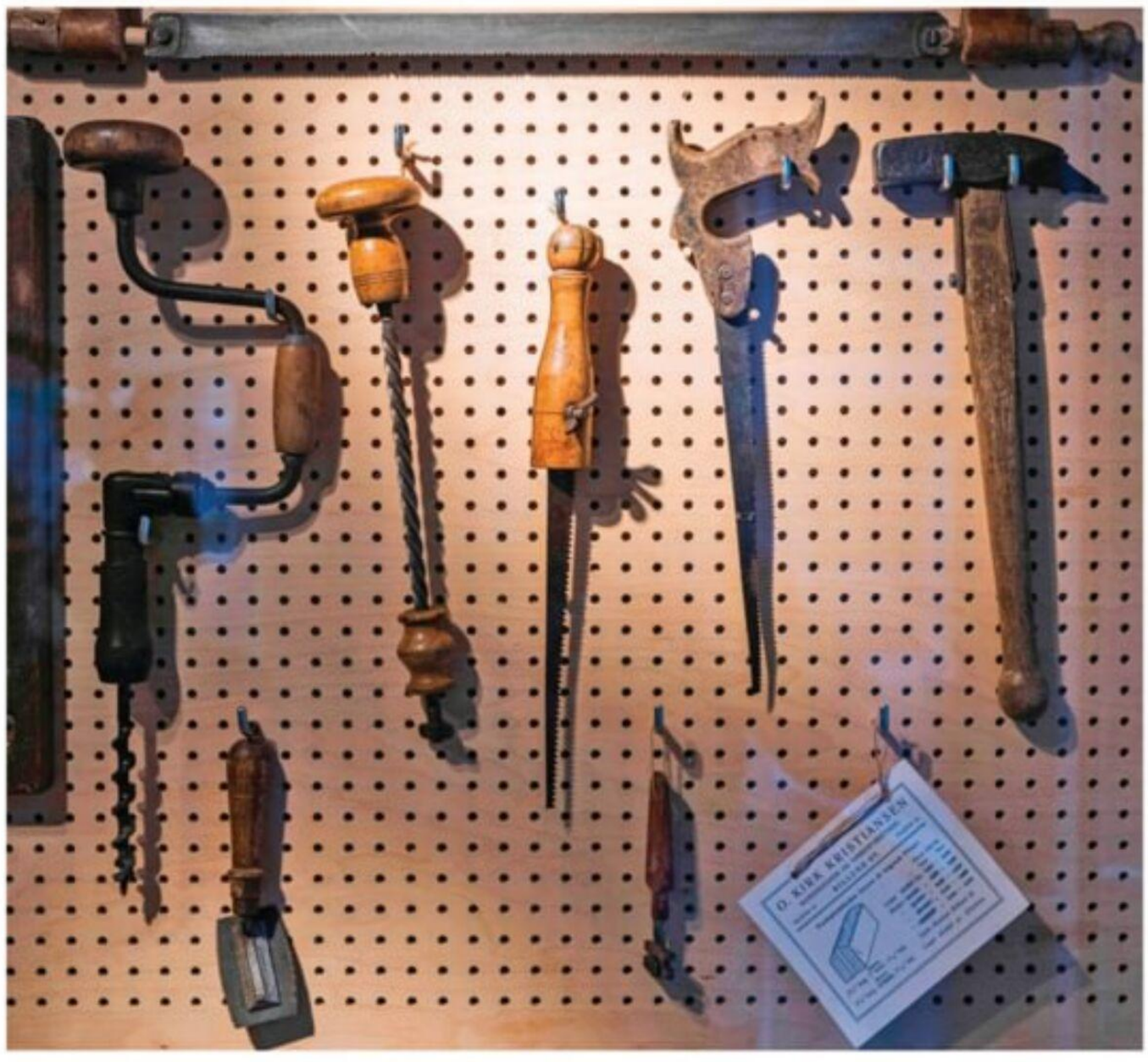
Sick with grief and on the verge of bankruptcy, Ole Kirk leaned into his faith. "Not necessarily in a religious sense," Godtfred's son Kjeld (CEO of Lego from 1979 to 2004) told Jens Andersen, author of the 2022 book *The Lego Story: How a Little Toy Sparked the World's Imagination*. "It's more about a a broader and more general faith—faith in the future." In his later years, Ole Kirk remembered brooding about his personal and professional losses, with creditors at his door, and experiencing an epiphany. "As though in a vision," he said, "I saw a large factory where busy people were bustling in and out, where raw materials were brought in and finished goods dispatched. The image was so clear I never again doubted that I would one day reach my goal: It was the factory that today is a reality."

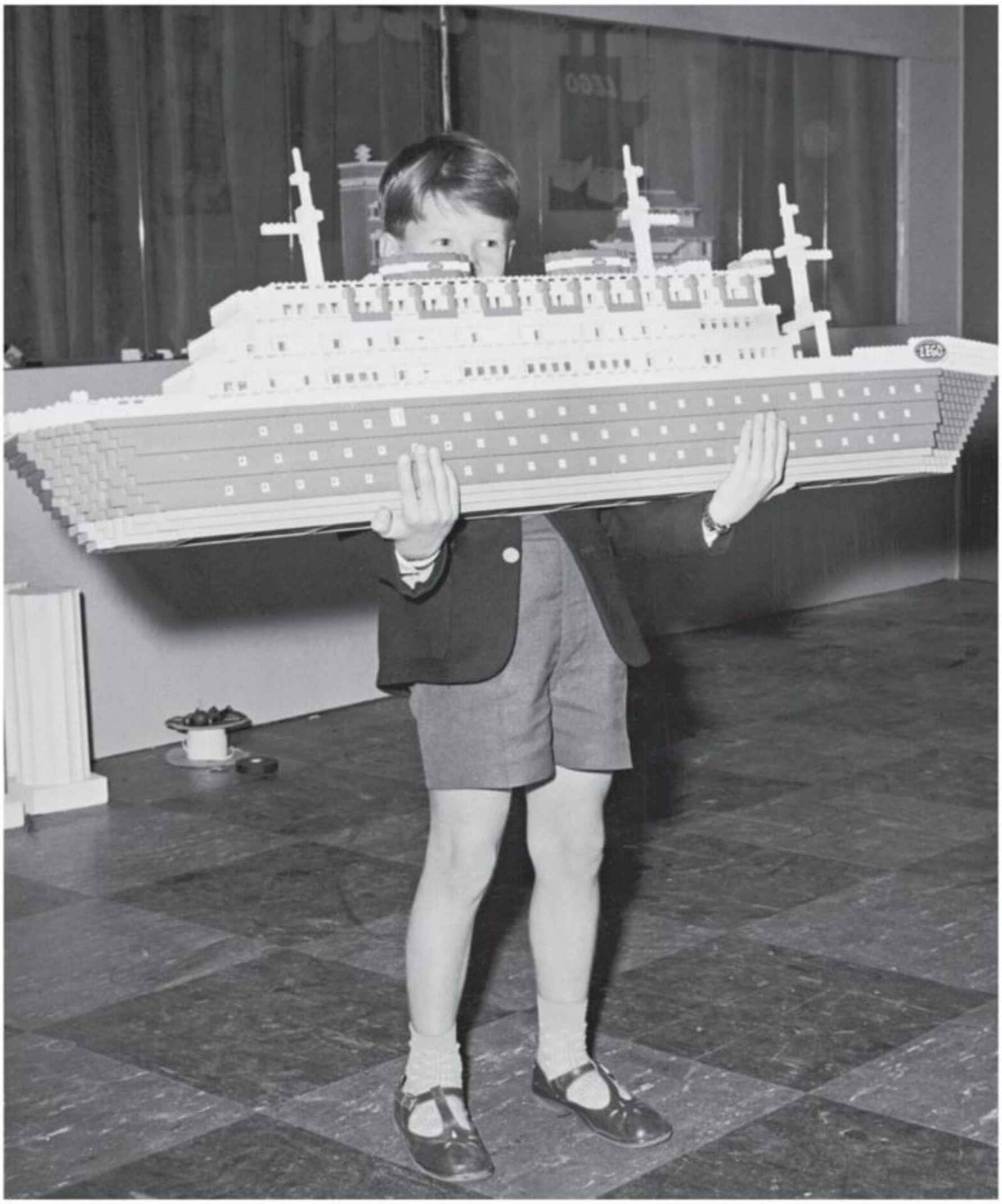
With his business on the ropes, Ole Kirk found an angel in the form of his new housekeeper, Sofie Jørgensen. She bonded with the children—and their father. The pair wed in 1934. Sofie's savings helped Ole Kirk settle his debts and keep the woodworking factory afloat. He also found some professional inspiration in a trade magazine's advice column, which suggested that even in hard times there was a market in essential utility products, such as stepladders and ironing boards, as well as another commodity that transcended economic conditions: toys. By 1935, Ole Kirk would make them the focus of his company.

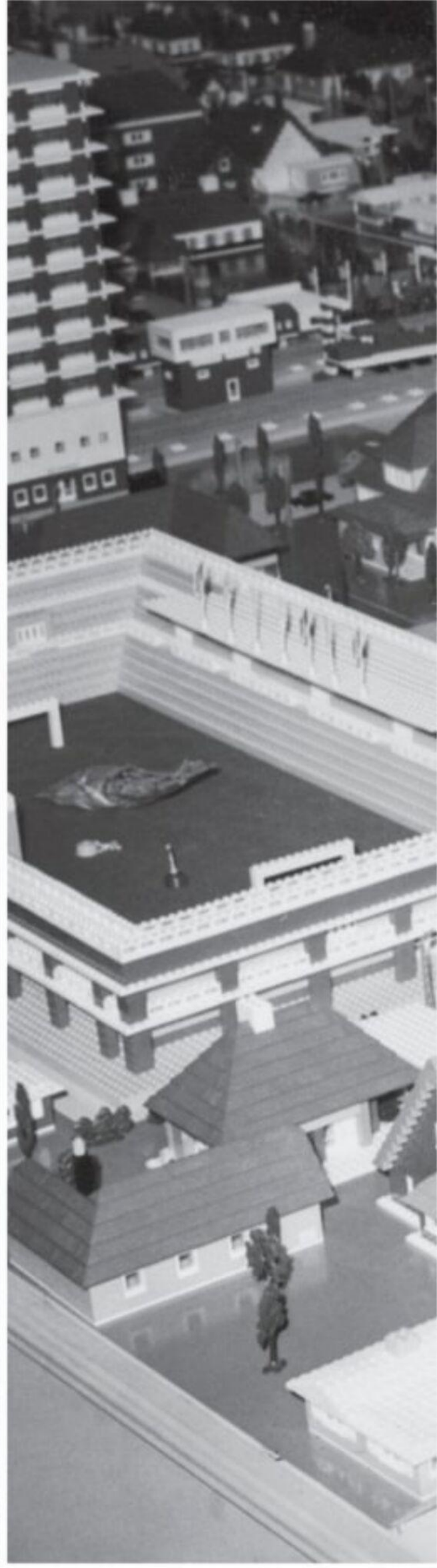
It was an era during which the importance of childhood, and more specifically play, was a hot topic across Europe. It was a perfect time to set in motion Ole Kirk's new business model, which was burnished by his perfectionist attitude toward woodworking. Christiansen's brightly painted products were exactingly handcrafted of the best-quality beechwood. Popular items included a horse and cart rig, cars, trucks, and yo-yos, briefly a craze in the early 1930s. One of the most iconic of these toys was a wooden duck with an orange mouth, black head, tail, and wings, and a red body. Resting on a black platform mounted on rolling wheels, the toy could be pulled by an attached string. As the wheels turned, they activated a mechanism that allowed the duck's beak to open and close.

Once Ole Kirk decided to concentrate on toy production, he realized that his company's name—Billund Maskinsnedkeri—was a bit of a mouthful. To come up with something catchier, he held a contest among his employees: Whoever submitted the best name would win a bottle of their boss's homemade wine. As it happened, the winner was Ole Kirk himself. He combined the Danish words "leg" and "godt," which combine to mean "play well." That was streamlined to a single word, which coincidentally happens to be Latin for "I assemble." The company officially used the name Lego for the first time in January 1936.

Though old-school in many ways, Ole Kirk was also a striver with a keen interest in new technology—machinery, processing equipment, materials—to enhance quality and speed production. In 1937, for instance, he bought a state-of-the-art milling machine for the price of the average house. It was that machine that Ole Kirk used to cut a sign in







beechwood bearing the company motto, which his son Godtfred—by then active in the company, designing and crafting wooden toys—hung up in the factory: "Only the best is good enough."

Despite World War II—and the German occupation of Denmark—the demand for Lego toys remained stronger than ever, so much so that sales doubled within the first two years of the conflict. Once again, however, adversity threw up a roadblock: On the night of March 20, 1942, a fire destroyed the woodworking factory, even melting machinery, though unlike the blaze nearly two decades earlier, it spared the Christiansens' adjoining house.

The name Lego is derived from the Danish words "leg" and "godt," which combine to mean "play well."

A long-standing appeal of Lego is the size and scope of what can be built, from a massive ocean liner to an entire neighborhood.

Rebuilding the factory seemed impossible—Lego's insurance wouldn't cover the loss and new construction. But a loan from Vejle Bank came through, and it allowed Ole Kirk to build a new facility in Billund dedicated entirely to toys, and to expand his payroll.

The war certainly presented challenges, what with rationing—and the Nazis, who commandeered Ole Kirk's factory for use to store materials. The toymaker maintained a civil façade toward the occupiers but was secretly active in the Danish resistance. As Godtfred recalled, "Dad would transport hand grenades, among other things, in the empty wooden boxes [marked LEGO] they would usually use for wooden toys…and that's how the resistance movement was passed supplies." During the chaotic period after Denmark's liberation in May 1945, Ole Kirk patrolled the streets as a kind of auxiliary policeman, a rifle over his shoulder, trying to control Danish vigilante mobs that were hunting down traitors and collaborators.

Meanwhile, business hummed along. The most popular items included toy irons and ironing boards for girls and cars and trucks for boys, as well as colorful blocks marked with letters and numbers used as educational tools for small children. By the war's end, Christiansen was finding it increasingly difficult to secure quality beechwood. But the period also

Lego play can be unstructured (opposite) or by following instructions for a specific project, like this taxi.

brought new technologies and possibilities that would revolutionize industry and modern life at large. Especially one word: plastics.

Here was a material that was more durable and economical than wood. As Jens Andersen wrote in *The Lego Story*, plastic "didn't have to be seasoned, steamed, oven-dried, milled, polished, painted, varnished, and finally assembled with screws, nails, and labels." Unlike wooden toys, which required multiple workers, plastic ones could be easily mass-produced "by a machine operated by a single person." Seizing on the new trend, in 1947, Ole Kirk invested in a pricey British plastic injection-molding machine, which he'd seen demonstrated in the U.K.

The toymaker brought something else back from Britain: small, interlocking red, yellow, blue, and green plastic building bricks, hollow underneath with slits on the side and studs on top. They were invented by Hilary Page, creator of a company called Kiddicraft—and Ole Kirk was fascinated with them. Lego proceeded to design its own version, which came out in January 1949 under the name Automatic Binding Bricks. As Godtfred recounted years later, they would "look like the samples we had from Kiddicraft, but there were three differences. We wanted sharp corners, flat studs, and an 8-millimeter [0.315- inch] module."

Although the bricks were fairly successful, they didn't match Lego's top-selling plastic toy, the authentic-looking Ferguson Tractor, with its rubber tires and steering mechanism, which hit the market in 1951. That year, Ole Kirk suffered a stroke, and Godtfred took on more responsibilities; by 1957 he would become managing director. Godtfred began to believe Lego's diversity of products—some 265—was a hindrance in the crowded international toy market. He decided to limit the company's focus to one commodity: those plastic cubes, which in 1952–53 were rechristened Lego Bricks.

Godtfred then set about developing an overarching philosophy behind his product—a way of making it more than a matter of sticking plastic pieces together. He envisioned what became known as the Lego System in Play, a grand scheme that, in effect, offered children almost limitless creative possibilities. "Our idea has been to create a toy that prepares the child for life," Godtfred explained, "appealing to the child's imagination and developing the creative urge and joy of creation that are the driving force in every human being."

His son Kjeld expanded on Godtfred's thinking in *The Lego Story*. "This was Dad's fundamental concept, that the whole thing should be a coherent system of elements that always fit together. Different bricks bought in different sets could always be combined," he said. In that way, a child could build a house, a car, a skyscraper, a stadium, even a whole town or city.

In the mid-1950s, Lego expanded beyond Denmark, establishing headquarters in Hohenwestedt, Germany. Before long, large Lego displays filled department-store windows across the country. Meanwhile, the company refined its product. One common customer complaint was that the bricks didn't hold together, and eventually Lego buildings fell apart. The molding-workshop manager devised a solution, placing three cylindrical coupling tubes inside the hollow cavity of the brick. That ensured that the tubes and studs interlocked firmly when two bricks were combined, adhering almost as if glued, yet they were also easy to pull apart. This so-called clutch power provides stability and astonishing potential. The patent was approved on January

28, 1958—the birth date of the modern Lego Brick as it endures to this day.

Less than two months later, Ole Kirk Christiansen died at age 66 of cardiac arrest. He left a staggering legacy, not only as a visionary toymaker but as a beloved patriarchal figure to his employees (he always referred to them as "people," not "workers"), the community of Billund, and beyond—as recently as 2023, a park in northwest Rome was named in his honor. Although the company was split between the Christiansen sons, it was Godtfred who emerged as the leader.

As the 1950s came to a close, the Lego system had spread throughout Western Europe, and the company soon planted its flag in the U.K. and United States, where in 1961 Lego entered into a decade-long sales and manufacturing agreement with Samsonite luggage. In fairly short order, Lego expanded to Japan, Morocco, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Australia. In the meantime, the company built up its headquarters in Billund, adding employees and creating a community, including housing.

Godtfred maintained a constant focus on innovation. In 1963, cellulose acetate, the material used to create Lego Bricks, was replaced by the more stable acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS). Nontoxic and less prone to discoloration and warping, ABS is more resistant to heat, acids, salt, and other chemicals. Through a division dubbed Lego Futura, which set up a test workshop in the late '60s, the first Lego train with rails and a 4.5-volt motor launched in 1966. The end of the decade saw the arrival of 12-volt trains with powered rails and a transformer.

All the while, Lego elements were made to look more specific and detailed—furniture, for instance, had to have authentic-appearing cupboards and drawers. In 1969, the Lego Group introduced a new plastic brick twice as large as the originals, called the Duplo (derived from the Latin for "double"), aimed at preschoolers but made so that it can fit together with the smaller standard bricks. In that way, the toys could serve as a bridge to more advanced building sets and concepts.

Lego's complex in Billund had become a tourist attraction, drawing about 20,000 visitors a year. That sparked an idea in Godtfred's mind: to house

Lego has created sets of just about everything, including this airport from the 1980s.

Friends figures are taller than standard minifigures but are compatible with all Lego toys.

Making Friends

After years of trial and error, the company created a successful line targeted at girls.

BY AVA ERICKSON

Throughout its decades-long existence, the Lego company has continually sought out ways to convince girls to play with its toys. In the 1970s, Lego introduced minifigures, in part to appeal to girls. In the 1980s and ’90s, the Scala, Paradisa, and Belville lines—which featured dolls and pink bricks—proved fruitless. And the Clikits toys from the early 2000s, which let girls assemble their own jewelry, didn’t quite click, either. By the 2010s, demographic studies continued to show that around 70 to 90 percent of Lego’s customer base was boys. But in 2012, the company finally got it right.

Lego Friends featured a group of five dolls, each with unique interests and personalities, along with settings ranging from a riding camp to a beauty salon. The dolls themselves were slightly bigger than minifigures, and they had detailed faces and clothing, designed to appeal to the target demographic, who are thought to be more interested in role-play than in building.

But the Friends were quickly met with backlash when critics called the line offensive, claiming it played into gender stereotypes that were harmful to children. The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood put Lego Friends on its shortlist for Worst Toy of the Year, describing the line as “so jam-packed with condescending stereotypes it would even make Barbie blush.” Eating disorders specialist Carolyn Costin said the toys promoted “damaging gender stereotypes and limits to creativity and healthy role development.”

Despite the critiques, Friends was wildly successful, selling twice as many sets as expected during its first six months. “With Lego Friends, we’ve managed to make creative construction toys more relevant for girls,” said the company’s then president, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp. “We look forward to developing the product line further in the years ahead.”

Since then, numerous sets have been released, and the characters have appeared in a TV show, a film, and two video games. Over the years, the branding became more gender neutral, and in 2023, the company released a new set of eight characters, representing a more diverse group. (Early lines included mostly white characters, and only girls.) What was once called the worst toy of the year is now being lauded by child development experts for its inclusion of figures with disabilities, its multicultural representation, and the overall character-driven concept.

a permanent collection of the kind of large-scale Lego models the company displayed in its design department and in special exhibitions. It turned out to be a huge hit and inspired one of Lego's boldest undertakings—a family theme park on the order of Disneyland and Denmark's Tivoli, showcasing large, elaborate models of buildings, bridges, towns, cities, vehicles, and figures. Godtfred presented it to his board of directors as "a children's paradise like nothing seen before…where the child is king." Much of the park's magic can be credited to design chief Dagny Holm, who built urban settings, castles, animals, and fictional characters from children's tales. "She was more of a sculptor and an artist than a designer," Kjeld explained. The success of the original Legoland—as an attraction and as a marketing tool—would eventually fuel eight more parks in Europe, North America, and Asia, the most recent of which opened in Goshen, New York, in 2021.

The architectural possibilities of Lego were not lost on adult consumers. To cite one example, author Norman Mailer designed a futuristic, utopian "six-foot sculptural model of his dream city," wrote the *Village Voice* in 1965. "His creation…rests on a wooden pedestal in his living room, with the panorama of Manhattan as a background. It has the haphazard shape of a child's drip castle in the sand."

In the 1970s, Lego expanded its product line to include minifigures, Lego people with movable arms and legs and hands that can grip things. These would come to include all manner of character, whether historic—medieval knights in castle sets—or futuristic, such Lego Space, with its astronauts, spacecraft, lunar rovers, and inevitably aliens, like the Insectoids. Minifigures, wrote Andersen, "reached cult status, and today there are 9 billion of them spread across the globe."

To appeal to girls, the designers added a detailed

First Lady Barbara Bush played along as part of the U.S. government's Head Start program in 1990. Opposite: Though Lego can be a solitary activity, kids often enjoy building together.

They Can't All Be Winners

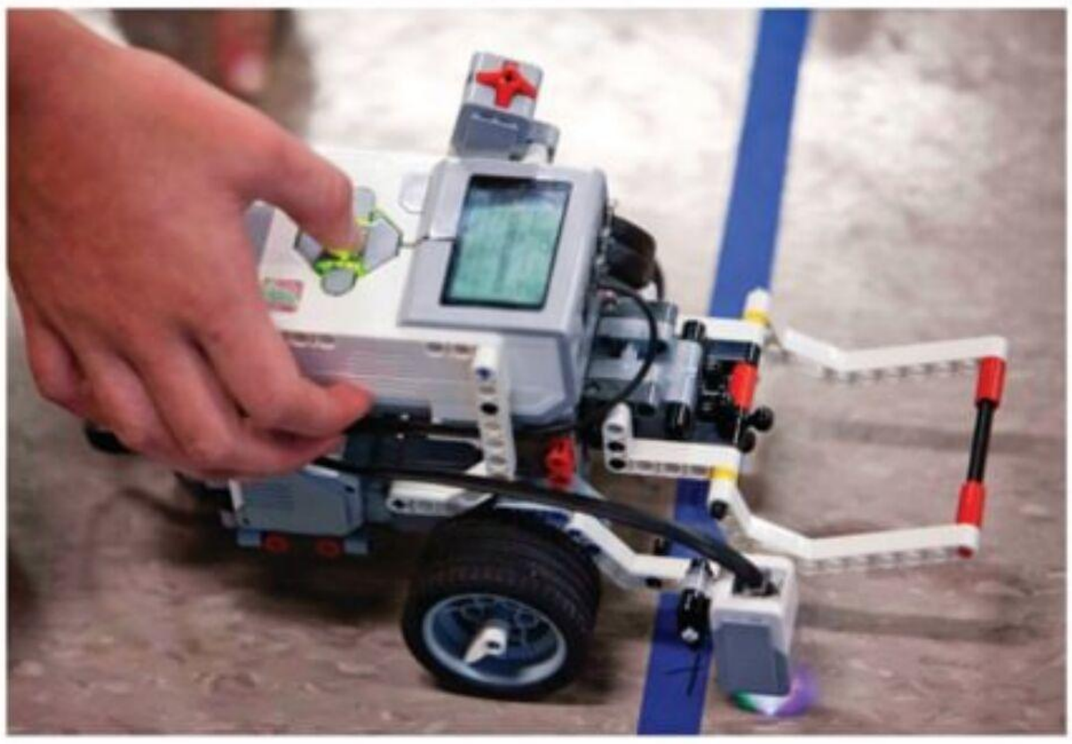
A few of Lego's big ideas never quite caught on.

BY COURTNEY MIFSUD INTREGLIA

Since 1975, young children have been able to play with Lego without parents worrying about their little ones swallowing or stepping on a brick. That year, the company released Duplo, a successful line of Lego Bricks and figures aimed at kids 18 months to 5 years old. Twenty years later, the company sought to reach an even younger market with Primo, a line of tub toys and stack-and-learn sets that targeted babies younger than 1. Unlike Duplo, Primo bricks were not compatible with other Lego product lines, so as a baby aged up, those blocks became far more obsolete than Duplo, which could be stacked with standard-size Lego blocks. The Primo line phased out in 1997—it turned out that the baby niche market was not profitable.

Primo was not an isolated example of Lego lines that were either not profitable, poorly conceived, or both. The Scala line, first in 1979 with jewelry and beauty accessories and then in 1997 with dolls, was another flop, in part because it also wasn't completely compatible with other Lego toys.

One of the most notable examples of innovation-turned-disaster at Lego was Galidor, a Power Rangers–like line of action figures that came with its own universe of branded accessories. As part of an entire media franchise, there were video games, McDonald's Happy Meals, and a sci-fi TV show, *Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension*, that would serve as a constant advertisement for the toys. All of this could have been a recipe for a landmark brand—if the TV show was any good. "We were gobsmacked with disgust when we saw the first episode," recalled Niels Milan Pedersen, one of Galidor's designers, in the book *Brick by Brick: How Lego Rewrote the Rules of Innovation and Conquered the Global Toy Industry*. "It was terrible." Without a TV show worth watching, the Galidor line experienced middling sales, and within a year, the product theme vanished.



dollhouse with knickknacks and hinges that opened and closed, and more realistic minifigures. Up until then, Lego buildings had been outward-oriented, closed and empty spaces; there would now be interiors, allowing for a more personalized experience.

The next decade brought the digital explosion, and Kjeld—who had taken the company reins from his father, Godtfred—saw the limitless potential of computers for play and learning. He struck up a partnership with Seymour Papert, an MIT mathematician and computer scientist who was a pioneer of artificial intelligence and advocate of hands-on experiential learning. "It was Seymour who introduced me to the idea of the intelligent bricks that

Several Lego lines have incorporated motorized and robotic elements, including the Technic CyberMaster (above) and the Mindstorm EV3, which can take multiple forms (left, above and below).

you could program yourself," Kjeld told Andersen. Having created the Lego wheel in 1962 and electric motor in 1966, "the next stage…was that people could build behavior into their models." In other words, Lego robotics. Papert's MIT Media Lab collaborated with Lego to develop bricks with built-in sensors, infrared photocells. Kids could make robots, cars, and construction equipment that could be controlled by computer. The technology would culminate in Lego Mindstorms, a robotics brand the company produced from 1998 to 2021.

The Lego Group hit the doldrums during the 1990s, though there were boosts from licensing agreements, such as the Star Wars series of sets and video games. Other spinoffs were tied to Harry Potter and various Steven Spielberg films. Late in the decade, the company fell deeply into the red for the first time, and some 1,000 employees, one-tenth of the work force, suffered layoffs. The new millennium brought a turnaround, however. Kjeld stepped aside in favor of Jorgen Vig Knudstorp, who served as CEO from 2004 to 2017, and a spate of new products caught fire—Lego Friends, centered around five teenage girls; Lego Technic, which employs gears, motors, pneumatics, and other components to create sophisticated models of working machines and vehicles; Lego City; and Ninjago, which is all about ninja. And even as the toy industry has struggled

DELL
Technologies
Hilton
webex by cisco
splunk>
FxPro

The Creator 3n1 line, including this Thunder Wings set, allows you to build three different models from the same kit. Left: Formula 1 driver Lando Norris autographed a Lego Technic version of his McLaren car in 2022. Among the set's features: an engine with moving pistons.

post-pandemic, Lego's revenue for fiscal year 2023 was up 2 percent to DKK 65.9 billion ($9.65 billion in U.S. dollars).

Then, of course, there's the computer-animated film franchise, which began with Warner Bros.' smash comedy adventure *The Lego Movie* in 2014. Acclaimed for its animation and witty script, it grossed nearly half a billion dollars worldwide. Several follow-ups were less successful, but the company has inked a new deal with Universal Pictures for five films. And as always, there is the constant stream of new Lego sets—recent releases range from the cathedral of Notre-Dame to the spies and minions of *Despicable Me*.

The company has made a priority of going green, investing $400 million in sustainability efforts. One ambitious intiative was to phase out the polymer ABS in bricks and other products and use recycled plastic from bottles. Test results were unsatisfactory, however, and now the company plans to triple its sustainability expenditures, aiming to reduce its carbon footprint and increase renewable energy.

"We know that children are looking to us to do what's right," said current Lego Group CEO Niels Christiansen (no relation to the company founders/owners). "Caring for the environment is one of their top concerns.... They are holding us to account, and we must set ambitious goals and take meaningful and lasting actions to protect their future." ◻

Where Lego Comes to Life

Legoland parks are popular tourist attractions, places "where children forget they ever need to grow up."

BY AVA ERICKSON

Dagny Holm, niece of Lego founder Ole Kirk Christiansen, was just 19 years old when she got her first job at the company. She worked there for three months in the mid-1930s, designing toys made of wood, before heading to Copenhagen to pursue her craft as a sculptor. Despite her initially short stint at the family business, Holm would return nearly 25 years later and play a vital role in the conception of one of Lego's most successful creations: Legoland.

After Holm's husband died in 1960, she moved back to Billund, Denmark, to work with longtime Lego employee Christian Lasgaard as a model builder. The two created large and intricate models made of Lego bricks that were put on display at the factory. By the mid-1960s, 20,000 people a year were coming to the factory to see the display, largely thanks to Holm's unique designs, which focused on creating dolls, characters, and animals as opposed to the buildings that Lego had historically prioritized. "I put a lot of effort into bringing them to life," she said. "That's why I always started with the dolls' eyes and later with the windows in the houses, because for me they're a mirror of the soul."

The sheer number of visitors was soon starting to become too much. Managing director Godtfred Kirk Christiansen moved the display to a farm nearby, but he saw even more potential, so he began pitching the idea of a Lego theme park to the company's board, describing it as a place where "the child is king, and where children forget they ever need to grow up."

By that time, Holm had earned the title of senior designer, making her the first woman at Lego with a title above canteen manager. She brought in a team of nine other women, whom she called "my girls": "We shared each other's sorrows and joys. We were girls in a man's world, and that brought us together." She started to put

Christiansen's ideas for a theme park on paper, sketching a plan for a circular space, 100 yards in diameter, where her builds could be displayed. Christiansen brought in esteemed window dresser Arnold Boutrup after seeing his woodland-themed window display in an Anva department store in Copenhagen. Under Boutrup's lead, Holm's design was expanded to cover 10 acres, including a canal for Lego boats, a Lego train line, and even an entire kid-size road system for bikes and Lego cars. In 1968, Legoland officially opened its doors.

Located near the factory in Billund, the park featured a "construction site" where people could play with Lego, a driving

The Legoland in Billund includes a replica of the Nyhavn waterfront in Copenhagen. Opposite: A water ride based on the World of Chima theme at the park in Winter Haven, Florida.

school where children could get a "Lego license" to drive mini cars, and a safari where visitors could view animals made completely of the bricks. At the center of the park was a miniature scene filled with Holm's re-creations of cities in Denmark and the rest of the world.

The first season welcomed 625,000 visitors, more than twice the number that Christiansen had predicted during his pitch. With the overwhelming number of guests, some of the executives, including Erik Tapdrup, head of the development department Lego Futura, and marketing director Helge Torpe had to pitch in to help wash dishes in the park's restaurant kitchen. The Billund site remained a consistent success for Lego (and is still open today), but it would be nearly three decades before the company would launch another location. In 1996, the second park, Legoland Windsor Resort, finally opened in England as part of the expansion plan of Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, Christiansen's son and then the president of the company. Boasting a miniature London and train rides, as well as the Sky Rider roller coaster, the park welcomed 1.4 million visitors during its first season.

Two more parks were opened, in Carlsbad, California, and Günzburg, Germany, before all four parks were sold to Merlin Entertainments in 2005 for 2.8 billion kroner (approximately U.S. $450 million at the time). After several years of financial troubles, selling the parks was, at the time, Lego's only way to get back on its feet. Merlin continued to open new locations, and there are now 10 parks throughout the world, including in Goshen, New York; Dubai, United Arab Emirates; and Nagoya, Japan. In 2022, more than 15 million people visited the parks globally.

Holm remained the chief model designer until her retirement in 1986, and while she passed away in 2004, her creative legacy remains at every Legoland in the elaborate Lego animals, the detailed Minilands, and the trains that carry millions of visitors through the parks every year.

Lego has produced thousands of different minifigures, from everyday people such as doctors and police officers to many licensed characters, including Star Wars icons and superheroes.

LIFE IN MINIATURE

These small figures helped put a face on Lego toys and are beloved by both kids and collectors.

BY AVA ERICKSON

IN THE EARLY MORNING OF APRIL 12, 2024, A hooded man smashed the window of a Bricks & Minifigs in Ontario, California, rushing into the small shop with a co-conspirator. The men grabbed handfuls of Lego minifigures from the display cases, shoved them into cardboard boxes, and fled the scene with 500 of them, worth about $7,000. This was part of a $100,000 crime spree across Southern California in which seven stores in the franchise—which sells valuable Lego sets and figurines no longer in production—were robbed. Local newspapers referred to the incidents as the "Lego heist," describing the stolen objects as "black market goods."

The loot? Four-centimeter-tall plastic figurines, complete with clip-on hair and C-shaped hands. Despite their small stature, these little guys are part of a big market. Since their inception in 1978, Lego minifigures have become valuable collectibles, starred in blockbuster movies, and traveled across the globe, and even to space (some minifigures are flying on NASA's Juno spacecraft, which is orbiting Jupiter right now). And, of course, they can be found in hundreds of thousands of homes around the world. With some 4 billion minifigures in existence, these characters have become an inextricable part of the Lego world.

In the 1960s, Lego tried to figure out how to target a female audience, as girls historically hadn't been as fond of the toys as boys, despite the company's attempts to market to all children. In 1969, Olaf Thygesen Damm, a member of the analytics department (a team dedicated to studying children's development, play, and reaction to Lego products), wrote a memo urging the company to introduce human figures, arguing that while boys are happy to build and play with *things*, girls want toys that relate to human situations and activities.

Among the minifigures released as part of the many collectible series are (from left) a rapper, a Hollywood starlet, a goth girl (officially called "spooky girl"), a pirate, and a soccer player. Opposite, from top: The Lego Movie *turned minifigures into box office stars; the little guys now represent just about every profession, including construction workers.*

"In the future, girls will not accept toys that consist only of objects," he wrote. "They want life. Girls require objects to be humanized."

Five years later, designer Jens Nygaard Knudsen developed a Lego family box in which a mom, dad, brother, sister, and even grandma could be built out of Lego pieces. The sets sold well, but they weren't size-compatible with other Lego products, so the following year, Nygaard Knudsen began developing minifigures. These fit the scale of the Lego buildings but were missing a key requirement from Damm's 1969 brief: "These figures or dolls cannot be rigid and angular. They must be able to sit and stand and be suitably proportional." In fact, the 1974 minifigures were even nicknamed the "pillar of salt" due to their lack of mobility.

But after 50 sketches and numerous prototypes, Nygaard Knudsen created what we now recognize as the minifigure (or "minifig," as they're often called). In 1978, about 20 different characters, with movable arms and adorable smiling faces, were launched. (The first official minifigures included a police officer, a firefighter, and a doctor.) They also had yellow heads and hands. That decision was based on reaction by a focus group and was supposed to be "ethnically neutral."

"We were in need of a bit of life in our Lego universe, and the minifigures certainly brought that," former Lego Group CEO Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen told author Jens Andersen for his 2022 book *The Lego Story*. While the minifigures didn't specifically solve Lego's struggle to capture the female market, they were nonetheless successful, quickly becoming an integral part of the Lego system.

In 1989, the minifigures got their first major revamp with the pirate collection. But these bitty buccaneers caused a bit of a stir in the company. Historically, Lego had been intent on promoting only peaceful, smiling figures, in line with the Scandinavian educational philosophy against war-themed toys. These new characters were armed, and even angry. Despite some concerns, the pirates were the company's biggest success to that point, clearing the way for different facial expressions and body parts (for example, a peg leg).

Over the following years, Lego introduced a variety of new features to the minifigures, including glow-in-the-dark elements (debuting on a ghost in 1990) and detachable beards. As video games and gaming systems such as Game Boy and PlayStation started to threaten traditional toys, Lego decided, in 1997, to create its own video game, *Lego Island*, starring a minifigure pizza-delivery guy who attempts to save a town from an escaped convict. The game

was successful, and there have been more than 50 minifigure-themed video games since.

Minifigures have appeared on other screens as well, including in films and TV shows, including a series of Star Wars–themed specials and, of course, *The Lego Movie* franchise. The first film was released in February 2014 and boasted an all-star cast including Will Arnett, Chris Pratt, and Will Ferrell as the voices of the minifigure characters. It was a massive success that led to three more movies.

While minifigures were originally created to appeal to children, there has also been a passionate adult fan base. In 1999, Lego's licensing deal with Star Wars opened the door for the minifigure to become the collectible we know today, including various characters from Disney, Marvel, and DC. Soon the toys started being resold to collectors well above their retail value.

By 2010, Lego had fully embraced this fan base (and their money), launching the Minifigure Collectors line. The first 16 characters included a surfer, a knight, and a caveman. In a savvy business move, they were sold in opaque bags so fans couldn't tell which one they were getting, forcing the more dedicated collectors to buy out stores in order to complete their set. Since then, 30 collectible series have been released, and collectors are now a key part of the minifigure customer base, amassing thousands of the tiny figures and displaying them on shelves, showing off their finds on social media, and attending Lego conventions in search of specific figures. Fans can even download the Minifig Collector app to catalog and organize their collections. Not surprisingly, prices have shot up on certain figures, such as the Spider-Man minifig from the 2013 San Diego Comic Con that is currently estimated to be worth about $16,000, according to BrickEconomy, an online guide to Lego values and trends.

Despite all these flourishes, in many ways, minifigures have stayed the same over the past five decades. They are still made from the same mold, most still have yellow faces (other than some licensed ones), and they are still a beloved item for children and collectors alike. But they have also progressed to reflect changing sensibilities. In 2016, a minifigure in a wheelchair was released, and over time, more female minifigs—including firefighters and ninjas—have made their debut in order to break gender stereotypes. According to Lego, "The whole point of minifigures is, they let children create and be anyone they want—male or female, helmet or hair, freckles or glasses, anything." ◻

Creating New Worlds

For more than 30 years, the Lego Group has offered original sets with their own rich storytelling.

BY COURTNEY MIFSUD INTREGLIA

POWER MINERS
Deep in underground caverns, a troop of mining specialists set out to find the source of several severe "earthquakes" responsible for devastation around the world. The Power Miners had to face Rock Monsters and scour for Energy Crystals. Toy sets were released in 2009 and 2010, and the story was fleshed out in a series of online video games.

BIONICLE
Among the most successful and longest-lasting Lego series, Bionicle uses a series of modified pieces from the advanced Technic line and ball-and-socket joints to create large, elaborate figures. The series, introduced in 2001 and spanning toys, video games, TV shows, and books, follows the exploits of the Toa, heroic biomechanical beings with elemental abilities. Their shared duty is to maintain peace throughout their universe.

FABULAND
Geared for younger children, the Fabuland sets included adorable animal-like creatures and booklets that introduced their stories.The line ran from 1979 to 1989 and spawned a claymation television show, *Edward and Friends*, that aired in the U.K. and Canada.

LEGENDS OF CHIMA
Chima is a magical world of untamed nature, beauty, and wonder. Released in 2013, the Legends of Chima theme featured several tribes of anthropomorphic creatures living in a world thrust into conflict. In addition to the building sets, the story was expanded in an animated TV series and video games.

PIRATES
Debuting in 1989, the Pirates theme was a major success, with sets depicting the adventures of treasure-hunting buccaneers and the soldiers they faced off against. The toys featured a new twist on the previously generic minifigures, adding facial hair and eye patches. The line was discontinued in the late 1990s, but due to demand it was revived twice, in 2009 and 2015.

LEGO CITY
If you're a police officer, a farmer, a stuntperson, or have just about any other job in the Lego universe, you belong to the City theme, a shared world of town-related system sets that have been released since 2005. A new wave of sets arrives each year, most recently a fire rescue plane and seaside harbor with a cargo ship, among others.

Playing with Lego alongside other children helps foster collaboration and cooperation.

LEARNING WITH LEGO

Fun *and* good for you? Childhood development experts agree that playing with the toys can help build cognitive, social, and motor skills.

BY BARBARA KIMBERLY SEIGEL

A PLAYROOM FILLED WITH LEGO TOYS—EVERYthing from Duplo blocks to intricately built Star Wars spacecrafts and minifigures—isn't just one filled with fun. It's a space filled with vast opportunities for children to learn and grow in a variety of ways. So much so that caregivers should overlook the very real and present danger of stepping on an errant Lego piece (if you know, you know).

"Learning through play is crucial because it engages children in an active, hands-on manner, making learning enjoyable and memorable," explains child development expert Amanda Gummer, PhD, the founder of FUNdamentally Children, an evidence-based consultancy firm that provides expertise in child development and play. A summary of the 2017 *Learning Through Play* report from the Lego Foundation (a corporate foundation that owns a percentage of the company and helps fund programs that promote learning through play for children 12 and under) supports this idea, stating: "Research shows that different areas of learning are more interconnected than previously thought and that playful learning experiences can be particularly effective ways to foster deeper learning and develop a broad range of skills and an understanding of academic concepts."

This is especially true with activities—such as those involving Lego toys—that both help develop and utilize several skills at once. "Playful activities like Lego building engage multiple domains of development simultaneously, including cognitive and creative, physical, and social and emotional aspects," says Erin O'Connor, EdD, a professor and program leader of early childhood education at New York University, cohost of the *Parenting Understood* podcast, and chief of education at Cooper, an online parenting community. "This holistic approach supports well-rounded development in children."

Playing with Lego toys helps children acquire and develop skills that they can take with them throughout a variety of scenarios and increasingly complex play (there's a Lego line for every stage of childhood)—and, of course, throughout everyday life. O'Connor notes that these skills are engaged when playing independently or with peers and adults. In fact, she explains, playing with an adult allows both for the adult to take interest in a child's play and for "scaffolding"—which "allows an adult to support a child in developing skills slightly beyond where they currently are developmentally." According to both O'Connor and Gummer, the skills supported by Lego play in general include:

Cognitive skills. Whether children are figuring out how to build structures on their own or following step-by-step instructions, they are developing and utilizing their cognitive skills. This includes

problem-solving, planning and sequencing, and spatial reasoning (or learning "to visualize and manipulate objects in three-dimensional space," explains Gummer). Open-ended Lego play also fosters creativity and imaginative thinking, with children able to "design their own creations from scratch and use their constructions in imaginative play, developing narratives and following storylines," Gummer adds.

Motor skills. Lego play and fine motor skills clearly go hand in hand, as manipulating small pieces and simply learning how to put the pieces together and pull them apart helps develop hand-eye coordination and dexterity. Gummer points out that gross motor skills might also be engaged as children move around to play and put together larger sets.

Social and emotional skills. The experts agree that collaboration, cooperation, communication, sharing, taking turns, empathy, and conflict resolution are skills encouraged by group play with Lego. For instance, Gummer notes that "collaborative sets or themes, such as Lego City or Lego Friends, can enhance social skills by encouraging children to role-play and build together." Furthermore, children can learn patience—with themselves and others, and for the inevitable moment when a Lego structure falls apart. They can also build persistence by "working through challenges and completing projects," explains O'Connor, who adds that "successfully building models and creations boosts confidence and self-esteem."

"Successfully building models and creations boosts confidence and self-esteem."

–EARLY EDUCATION EXPERT ERIN O'CONNOR

All the while, O'Connor says, executive functioning skills (which help people learn) are supported through Lego play, as these encompass "cognitive skills such as planning, working memory, and impulse control, as well as SEL [social emotional learning] skills that focus on understanding and managing emotions and building relationships."

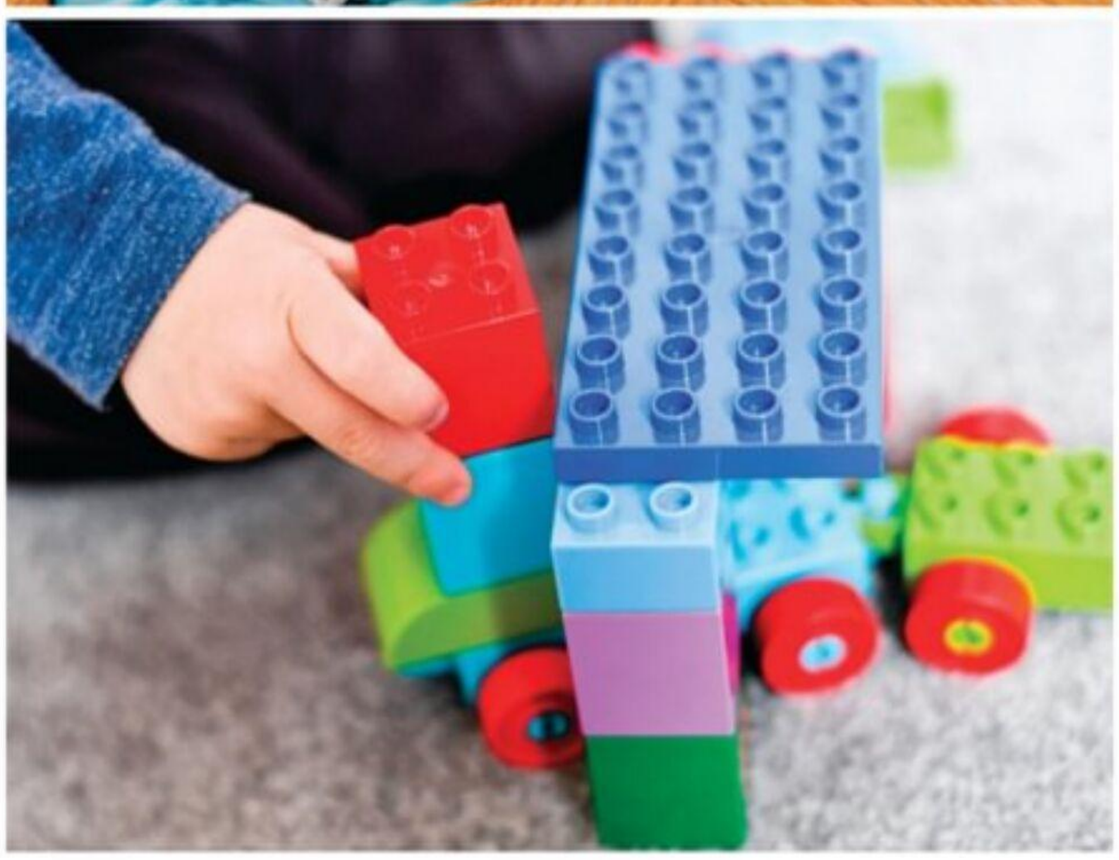
Sarah Corning, aka Science Teacher Sarah, whose STEM-based nonprofit Science Adventure Kids, Inc. offers science classes and camps to children in New York City, says the power Lego can have in a room full of children is "pretty amazing" in that a simple bucket of bricks can help them open up, build friendships, and ultimately learn. "They all just sort of gravitate toward it and start talking with each other and find pieces for each other and help each other build things—and then they'll make up a whole scenario around what's going on," she says, describing how Lego can foster creativity as well as other aspects of children's cognitive, social and emotional, and physical development.

Learning through play might certainly involve offering children bricks of various sizes, as it is "allowing children to manipulate objects, experiment, and discover things for themselves," explains O'Connor. Lego toys can also provide an interactive way to teach specific subjects, "integrating play with educational content," says Gummer. "This approach helps children retain information better and develop a love for learning."

The broad concept of learning through play is woven through the spectrum of Lego experiences, with children interacting with the toys in different ways as they master new skills and grow. "The learning benefits of playing with Legos evolve significantly as children grow and develop, reflecting their changing cognitive, motor, and social abilities," says O'Connor. "In general, the learning potential of Lego evolves in tandem with children's developmental stages."

These stages range all the way from toddlers—who are, says O'Connor, "developing hand-eye coordination by stacking and fitting pieces together," beginning to understand the concept of cause and effect, and "primarily exploring Duplo blocks through touch, taste, and manipulation"—to older children (9 and up), who may "explore more sophisticated engineering principles, like structural integrity, force, and motion, as they build robots, machines, and other complex creations" and even share their creations online or design their own instructions.

There are many developmental stages in between. Children will use Lego figures and settings as they develop an increased ability for symbolic play, storytelling, and emotional awareness, and they will move from Duplo-size bricks to smaller pieces as their fine motor skills and creativity expand. (Caregivers should, of course, make sure



Lego toys can support learning for all ages—ranging from Duplo (bottom left) for young children to more complex builds, like Creator 3n1 sets (top left and bottom right), and interests, like Minecraft (top right).

children are developmentally ready to avoid putting small pieces in their mouths.) As they enter kindergarten and proceed through grade school, they are able to follow more complex instructions and develop more advanced problem-solving skills, and are introduced to more technical engineering-type concepts, such as balance, stability, and gears. O'Connor adds that even kids' ability to use Lego to tell a story with greater character awareness and a beginning, middle, and end evolves throughout early childhood.

Lego toys have also been used to help build social and emotional skills in neurodivergent children, such as those on the autism spectrum, who might get developmental benefits (including increased social interaction and communication skills) from group play. Programs, including one supported by the Lego Foundation, stem from Lego-Based Therapy, a methodology developed by neuropsychologist Daniel LeGoff, PhD, and based on his 2004 study "Use of Lego as a Therapeutic Medium for Improving Social Competence" in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. Furthermore, Lego play can be adapted for children with different needs, as Lego aims to make learning through play more inclusive, with sets like Play with Braille for visually impaired individuals.

While the acquisition and utilization of broad skills through play often occurs simultaneously, O'Connor notes that "different types of Lego play tap into distinct areas of development, and the balance shifts depending on whether a child follows instructions or builds freely." For instance, following the instructions of a Lego set may take more sequential thinking skills than designing one's own creation, which more directly fosters divergent thinking, creativity, and self-expression. But the key word is balance, as one set of skills can open doors for another. "Even when following set instructions," says Gummer, "children often modify or enhance their builds, adding personal touches that reflect their creative thinking."

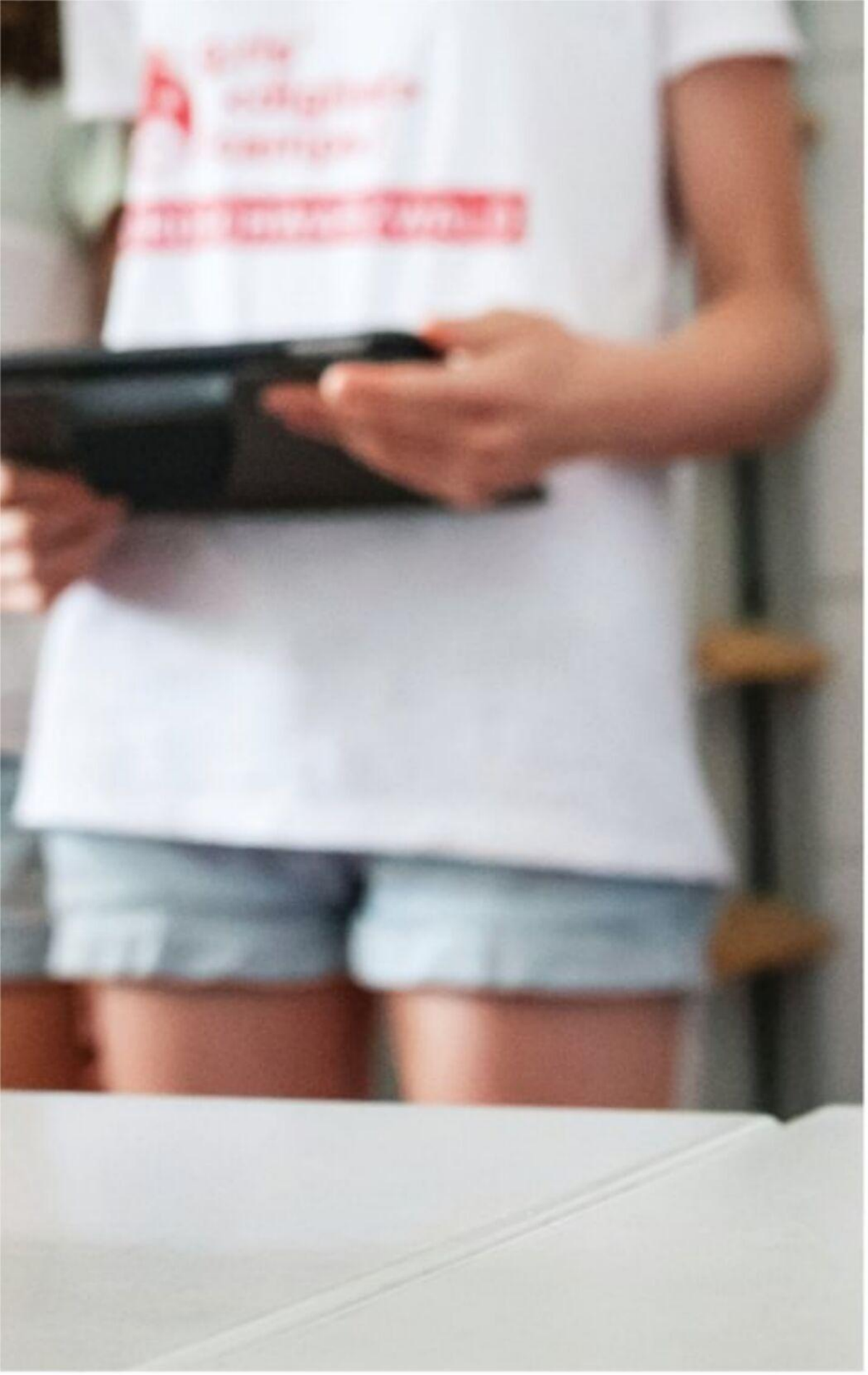
Lego Education sets such as Spike Prime are geared for skill development in the classroom and come with teacher resources.

Children might gravitate toward one kind of play over another, but Corning believes it's important to encourage it all, providing structure and a pattern to children who tend to prefer creative play and an outcome that encourages more creativity to those who tend to want to follow the instructions. "We should learn how to follow a pattern. We should learn how to follow a set of instructions," she says. "But we should also be capable of taking things apart, rebuilding them, and making them into something new and being creative with them."

An integration of these skills can be supported throughout Lego lines, from Duplo sets that encourage building and storytelling with figures and pieces marked with realistic details to Creator 3in1 sets (for ages 6 and up) that allow children to put together a model in three different ways, like a retro camera that can be rebuilt into a TV. Plus, from Marvel to Minecraft to Disney and more, there are kits for children who want to immerse themselves in specific make-believe worlds. The 2022 *Learning Through Play and the Development of Holistic Skills Across Childhood* summary report by the Lego Foundation (a follow-up to the company's 2017 report on play) discusses an interconnection between the development and utilization of holistic skills (which the report breaks down into cognitive, creative, physical, social, and emotional) and their sub-skills in children when engaging in complex tasks, including play.

The report indicates that while there are numerous studies focusing on a positive link between play and one set of holistic skills (namely cognitive skills) and their development in children, there is a "marked lack of research showing positive links between learning through play and more than one holistic skill or sub-skill together," and that most of the research is based on children ages 3 to 5. One might say that the proof is in the play—and in the classroom.

Lego play clearly supports child development and the skills kids need to become lifelong learners and



thinkers. Also, says O'Connor, it offers ways to understand the core concepts of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math) education—from basic principles (think gravity, balance, stability, shape, and texture) to more complex ideas of how different mechanisms, such as gears and pulleys in Lego Technic sets, work together.

In STEAM education, "problem-solving, experimentation, scientific inquiry, and early math skills like geometry, estimation, and measurement" are specifically supported, explains O'Connor. There are Lego Education sets recommended for classrooms from pre-K to middle school that delve even further into STEAM concepts, with coding and robotics supported by various products.

With even the most entry-level Duplo blocks, children are inherently introduced to STEAM concepts when using their developing cognitive skills to create simple structures. They are, in essence, embarking upon an engineering path, or as Corning describes it, a "putting-things-together path," early on. She also uses Lego references to explain the world around us, telling children that "molecules are the Legos of the universe" to get them to understand how the universe works and is held together.

Similarly, looking at Lego pieces as the individual components of a structure can help children. The ability to think in three dimensions is enhanced through building; children are required to "understand how different pieces can be combined and how changing one part of a structure can affect the whole," Gummer says. This kind of spatial reasoning, she adds, is "crucial not only in everyday tasks but also in fields such as engineering, architecture, and computer science."

Children (especially young ones) do not realize that they are developing and utilizing the interconnected cognitive, motor, and social and emotional skills that are needed throughout life when they are engaged in play that is active, meaningful, joyful, and offers intrinsic motivation to learn and explore, O'Connor says.

"Fun and playfulness encourage children to think outside the box, experiment with different ideas, and take risks without fear of failure," she notes. "This fosters creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills." She adds that "playful activities like Lego building can reduce stress and anxiety in children, [which] creates a conducive environment for learning and development." That environment can be both external and internal—"the open-ended nature of Lego play allows children to explore their imaginations without limitation," says Gummer.

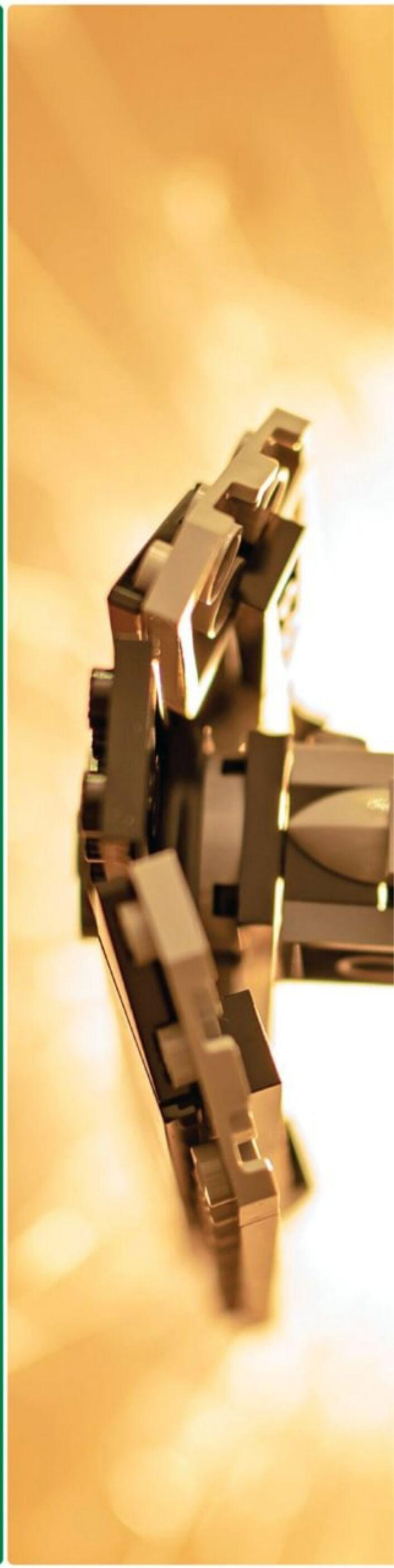
Even if children do not cite Lego toys as their favorite building blocks in the playroom (gasp!), children (and adults, for that matter) see them everywhere. "They are just so universal," Corning says. "Everybody has a slightly different take on them, which makes them great for kids to learn so many different angles, different elements of life." Plus, she says, "they are easy to understand—the physics is pretty simple, and yet it can become so grand, all at the same time."

And that, indeed, is a metaphor for the myriad skills that can be engaged and fostered through Lego play. On their own, these skills may seem like simple pieces of a more complex puzzle—but together, they can create a magnificent, interconnected framework for overall development and learning. ◻

CHAPTER 2

FROM BRICK TO SCREEN

Lego has extended its pop culture influence as an entertainment powerhouse in movies, television, and video games.



Lego's version of Darth Vader is slightly less menacing than the original Star Wars villain.

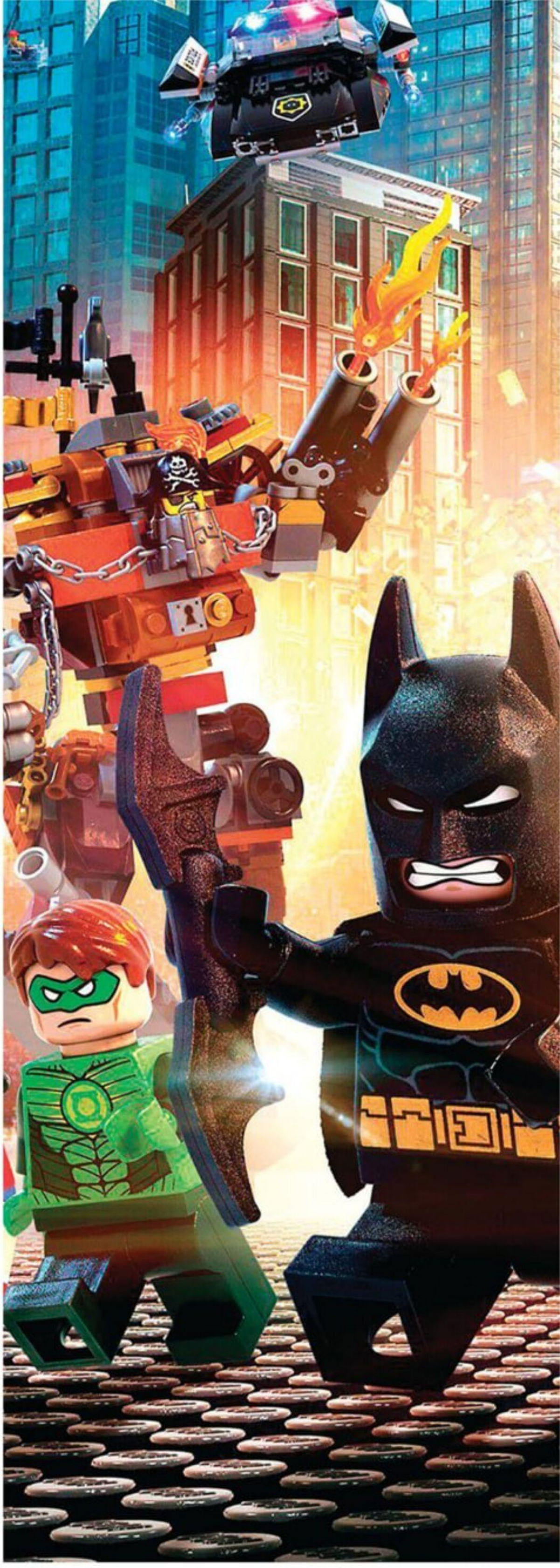
BOX OFFICE BRICKTACULAR

The 2014 hit *The Lego Movie* presented an entertaining—and surprisingly subversive—animated adventure that brought the famed toys to life. In the end, everything was awesome.

BY GINA McINTYRE

TURNS OUT YOU REALLY CAN BUILD ANYTHING with Lego. Even an Oscar-nominated hit movie. Defying all expectations, 2014's *The Lego Movie* exploded into theaters like a candy-colored rocket ship full of mirthful comic adventure and surprisingly edgy subtext. Rather than a 90-minute ad for the popular bricks, writer-directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller created an emotionally affecting, visually stunning feature with an A-list cast and an awesome song guaranteed to get stuck inside your head.

The secret to such sophisticated artistry? "We made something that uses Lego as a medium to tell a story rather than a story to sell Lego," Miller told the *Hollywood Reporter* in 2015. "We saw it as a way to talk about creativity. We were using it as a Trojan horse to slip in some subversive ideas under the cover



Emmet (center) teamed up with Batman, Wyldstyle, and a squad of minifigure heroes to save the day.

of making a very corporate-friendly family movie."

Although it's unquestionably friendly to Lego, the film did not originate with the Danish company. Producer Dan Lin (*Sherlock Holmes*) had the idea for the movie after observing his young son at play. "He had two bricks clicked together, and he was running around the house flying them like they were a spaceship," Lin told the *Hollywood Reporter*. "They were just two bricks, but in his mind, it was a much grander adventure. And I thought, 'Wow, what a creative toy. There should be a movie.'"

In modern-day Hollywood, the idea of a movie based on Lego might seem like a no-brainer. Long before 2023's *Barbie* took the world by storm, toys and board games had been enjoying starring turns on the big screen, though they gained a different prominence with Michael Bay's 2007 blockbuster *Transformers*. Based on the popular Hasbro toy line, the CG-laden action flick elevated the profile of the kiddie-product genre by raking in upwards of $700 million at the worldwide box office. Not only did it launch a massive franchise, it also spawned a wave of toy aisle–inspired films, including 2009's *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra* and 2012's *Battleship*.

Yet *The Lego Movie* initially proved a hard sell. When Lin pitched executives on the concept in 2008, they didn't immediately spark to the idea. The interlocking plastic bricks had been an enduring favorite among children and adults since they were introduced in 1949; top brass felt that there was no need to jeopardize the goodwill the brand had amassed over all those years with a film that could potentially damage its reputation. "A little bit of the reaction with headquarters in Denmark was 'Well, why would we even want to do that?'" Jill Wilfert, now Lego's head of global entertainment, recalled to *Variety* in March 2024.

It was only after Lin commissioned screenwriters Kevin and Dan Hageman (*Hotel Transylvania*) to pen an early treatment for a fun, character-based adventure set in an animated Lego universe that the company got on board. "Once we heard the pitch, how Dan felt he could bring the values of the brand to life, we started to think, 'This could be interesting,'" Wilfert told the *Hollywood Reporter* in 2015.

At that point, Lin began seeking out directors with experience in both animation and comedy—he landed on Lord and Miller, whose credits included the family-friendly *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* and the raunchy, R-rated romp *21 Jump Street*. But the pair, famed for their wickedly irreverent humor, had

President Business (aka Lord Business) was the control-freak villain behind the threat to Bricksburg. Opposite: The film included a mix of characters, both new (like Emmet) and licensed (including DC, The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and Harry Potter).

reservations. Like the Lego executives before them, the duo harbored concerns that the film would be less about storytelling and more about advertising. "It was definitely an issue for us," Miller told *Forbes*. "Right from the start, we were skeptical about doing it because people could see it as a giant commercial, and that wasn't something we were interested in doing. Luckily, the people at Lego felt the same way. They didn't need a movie to boost sales. If anything, making a movie had much more downside. So they had the same philosophy as us, which was to use Lego as a medium rather than a product to sell."

Lord and Miller set about fleshing out their own take on the screenplay, crafting an upbeat action-comedy that simultaneously served as a winking indictment of consumerism and conformity. "We wanted to make an anti-totalitarian film for children," Lord told the *Guardian*. "Something that was talking about the importance of freedom and innovation in keeping society honest."

They centered the film on everyman protagonist Emmet Brickowski, the most regular guy in the metropolis of Bricksburg. He's abnormally normal. His favorite show is a sitcom called *Where Are My Pants?* His favorite song is the ubiquitous "Everything Is Awesome!!!"—he listens to it on repeat during his daily bumper-to-bumper commute. Fueled by the $37 cup of coffee he picks up on his way to work, he arrives to his construction job every morning ready to assemble buildings according to the directions he's given.

Emmet's comfortable, if somewhat lonely, routine is forever upended by avowed nonconformist Wyldstyle. Emmet spies her trespassing at his job site one night, and while attempting to warn her that she's breaking the rules, he quite literally stumbles across the coveted Piece of Resistance. The sacred object is key to saving the world from the duplicitous Lord Business—the villain, who has been posing as Bricksburg's president, is preparing to unleash a

dangerous weapon known as the Kragle that will freeze the city's residents into place forever.

Convinced by Emmet's discovery that he is the Special—the chosen one prophesized to bring down Business—Wyldstyle whisks him away to rendezvous with her allies, including the mystic Vitruvius and her boyfriend, Batman. It's only much later that she realizes there is nothing remotely special about Emmet—a fact that greatly chagrins the elite team of experts known as master builders who initially cheered his arrival, a group that includes such great minds as Superman (Channing Tatum), Abraham Lincoln (Will Forte), and Shaquille O'Neal.

"We wanted to subvert the idea of the hero's journey," Miller told *Indiewire*. Added Lord in the same conversation, "Yeah, our big idea was that he's not allowed to be remotely special at all to start the movie. He's…literally plucked at random. That's interesting to me. Make the chosen one not at all stealth."

As the film's leads, the directors cast versatile actors who evinced a natural facility for comedy. A pre–*Guardians of the Galaxy* Chris Pratt, then best known for playing sweet-natured if clueless Andy Dwyer on the sitcom *Parks and Recreation*, took on the starring role of Emmet. Clever and capable heroine Wyldstyle was played by Elizabeth Banks (*Pitch Perfect*), while *Saturday Night Live* veteran Will Ferrell portrayed Lord/President Business. As the Crocs-wearing wizard Vitruvius, the film featured Oscar winner Morgan Freeman in his animated movie debut.

Batman was voiced by Will Arnett, who had a field day with the brooding hero's intense persona and sonorous speaking voice. "It feels like the voice of Batman has gotten more and more serious and dark [over the years]," Arnett told the *Huffington Post*. "You know how [*The Dark Knight* star] Christian Bale talks like this. In a low tone.... I wanted to take that and just have Batman talk in that voice all the time. Especially for super mundane stuff."

Lord and Miller encouraged the stars not to stick to the script too closely during their recording sessions. While some takes needed to be delivered verbatim to match the work the animators were doing, the directors also wanted the cast to feel free to improvise—an approach that often yielded humorous results. "Typically [with an animated film], the screenplay word for word is the holy grail," Pratt said at a 2014 screening of *The Lego Movie*. "We had opportunities to work with other actors, almost like doing a staged reading, like an old radio show.... There's this magic that happens when you have people who are capable of ad-libbing."

Lord and Miller took an equally unconventional approach to crafting the movie's visuals. Inspired by the homemade qualities of "brick films"—amateur shorts utilizing Lego bricks and minifigures—the creative partners agreed that everything in *The Lego Movie* should look as though it was made from the bricks and theoretically could be assembled with the right quantities of Lego products. The mandate applied equally to skyscrapers, pirate ships, and double-decker couches, as well as the ocean waves, cloud formations, and massive explosions seen on screen.

"We wanted to make an anti-totalitarian film for children. Something that was talking about the importance of freedom and innovation in keeping society honest."

–WRITER-DIRECTOR PHIL LORD

To emulate the look they were after, the team, including animation co-director Chris McKay (*Robot Chicken*), used CG animation to replicate some of the tactile qualities of stop-motion animation. "It grounds it in something that's real and something that has a charm and an innocence and naivete…the epic vision of what a child could dream up," McKay told *Indiewire*.

The characters were designed to show a certain amount of wear and tear to suggest they'd been played with often—Miller even supplied a minifigure he'd owned since childhood for the production, a "1980-something space guy" with a cracked helmet (named Benny, the character was voiced by Charlie Day). Similarly, the environments were equally imperfect, with gaps visible between some bricks hinting that they hadn't been fully clicked into place, and with thumbprints and smudges marring their surfaces.

Technicians at Australian visual effects outfit

"I guess [producers] Phil [Lord] and Chris [Miller] captured something about my real personality," Pratt said of the easygoing Emmet.

Animal Logic, known for animated features including 2006's *Happy Feet*, used a program called Lego Digital Designer to translate early storyboard images into signature brick form. "We'd draw a scene on storyboards in L.A., then send those off to Australia, where they would 'Lego-ize' them," Lin told the *Hollywood Reporter*. "If we drew a dog, it would come back as a Lego dog."

The production spanned three years, and when *The Lego Movie* opened in February 2014, it became an immediate sensation with audiences and critics. "It may be a helter-skelter kiddie adventure built out of plastic toy components, but it's fast and original, it's conceptually audacious, it's visually astonishing, and it's 10 times more clever and smart and funny than it needed to be," raved *Entertainment Weekly*'s Owen Gleiberman. "Here, at last, is an animated comedy that never stops surprising you."

The film earned $470 million at the worldwide box office, went on to win two BAFTA Awards, and earned an Oscar nomination for best original song for "Everything Is Awesome!!!", the movie's signature anthem performed by indie pop duo Tegan and Sara. But for Lord and Miller, some of *The Lego Movie*'s true impact is owed to its surprise live-action conclusion. In a twist near the end of the movie, it's revealed that Emmet's world is, in fact, a giant Lego construction inside the basement of a family home that belongs to the stern father of a young boy, Finn (Jadon Sand).

Played by Ferrell, Finn's dad is the all-powerful deity the Man Upstairs, referred to during the movie, as well as the inspiration for Lord Business. He forbids his son to touch the extensive Lego landscape he's built, which is held in place with Krazy Glue (which appears as Kragle, thanks to a damaged label) so that no piece is ever out of place.

It's only by seeing the joy Finn experiences using his imagination to play with the plastic pieces that the Man finally relents, throws out the rules, and joins in the fun, bonding with his son—through Lego, of course. "We did want to do something at the end you were not expecting, and something that would sort of tie everything together," Miller told *USA Today*. "We wanted to show there's a real family story at the heart of the movie that you only realize at the end. It's what it all really means."

Awesome, indeed. ◻

THE ADVENTURE IS BUILDING UP!
THE LEGO MOVIE
SCAN YOUR "THE LEGO MOVIE" CUP
EMMET
Ask about our special toys for children under 3.

The movie was ubiquitous in 2014 thanks in part to Tegan and Sara's "Everything Is Awesome!!!" and marketing tie-ins like a McDonald's Happy Meal.

A Terrific Toy Story

In 2014, *Time*'s film critic praised the movie's dazzling animation and inspiring (some might say irreverent) plot.

BY RICHARD CORLISS

Along the way on their dangerous adventure, Emmet, Wyldstyle, and Batman form an unlikely love triangle.

You might not realize it yet, but we've just set your weekend plans. Take the kids to *The Lego Movie*—the funniest, cleverest, most exhaustingly exhilarating animated feature in ages—then leave them to play with their toys and see it again for your own wicked amusement. A few days each year, every family deserves to be happy.

To a short list of wonderful animated features about cloth or video playthings—Pixar's *Toy Story* trilogy and Disney's *Wreck-It Ralph*—add this delight from directors and co-writers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller. The liveliness of their *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* cartoon and the live-action *21 Jump Street* hardly prepares audiences for their ability to transform blocky Lego figures, with painted faces and limited arm or leg mobility, into charming or rapacious characters a viewer can instantly accept and believe in. The technique, which combines stop-motion, animation, and CGI, has an aptly rough, faux-primitive look, as if some brilliant kid made a madly elaborate home movie the whole world could love.

The story, which moves so fast that viewers should wear seat belts, begins in the super-regimented city of Bricksburg, where employees of the megalith Octan Corp. do everything they're supposed to: work in the Octan factory, drink overpriced beverages, watch the nightly sitcom *Where Are My Pants?*, and follow the Instruction Booklet as their bible. Our hero Emmet (voiced by Chris Pratt) is the droniest of drudges: He consumes the party line yet feels ignored by his longtime coworkers—because they completely ignore him.

One day he stumbles upon a toy piece that could trigger the revolution dreamed of by underground rebels, including the blind seer Vitruvius (Morgan Freeman) and the prole punkster Wyldstyle (Elizabeth Banks). They believe Emmet could be the Special, the Neo of the Lego Matrix, which would make him "the greatest, most interesting, most important person in the world"—basically the Dos Equis guy with a liberal agenda. Emmet is none of these things, at least not yet; he's friendly but a little short of IQ. He and the insurrectionists must battle long odds to overthrow the Legoland ruler, lord and tycoon President Business (Will Ferrell).

"Hi, I'm President Business, president of the Octan Corp. and the world," his genially authoritative voice booms across the land. "Let's take extra care to follow the instructions"—and he malevolently whispers *"Or you'll be put to sleep"* before returning to his cheerful pitchman's tone—"and don't forget, Taco Tuesday's coming next week!" Under his secret identity of Lord Business, he plans to glue the world together with a weapon known as Kragle so that "everyone will stop messing with my stuff." To this nightmare amalgam of John D. Rockefeller, Boss Tweed, Kim Jong Il, and a bratty rich kid who won't share his toys, conformity is peace, and imagination is insurrection.

No question that the movie promotes what Prez Biz would call a subversive message: Be creative with your toys. It also urges kids to venture out of the virtual world they live in and use their hands for something other than typing. But if the *Lego Movie* workers have seized the means of production, it's only to increase production—to sell more toys, and tickets for a film whose official title is *The Lego® Movie*. The Lego Group is the world's largest toy company, with a single, almost infinitely adaptable product.

Toward the end, the movie gets pretty meta, with a live-action sequence suggesting that the most authoritarian dude in toyland could be the dad who shouts "Leggo my Lego." But this simply reinforces the tactics and tone of the picture, which says anything goes when imagination runs gloriously rampant. Anticipating blockbuster status, Warner Bros. has already bruited a sequel. That'd be fine, but we'd like to see Lord and Miller set loose on other brands from Scandinavia.

The Ikea Movie, anyone?

The Lego Batman Movie *featured DC Comics favorites (clockwise from bottom left) Joker, Harley Quinn, Batgirl, and, of course, Batman.*

THE LEGO CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

In the aftermath of the first movie's success, filmmakers assembled a series of spinoffs.

BY GINA McINTYRE

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS TOO MUCH OF A GOOD thing. So naturally, after it became clear that *The Lego Movie* was a massive hit with audiences, the film's creative partners got to work on a follow-up ASAP. To start, they plucked one key supporting character from the movie's colorful ensemble: Will Arnett's super-duper, extra-dark Batman.

Released in February 2017, *The Lego Batman Movie* placed the blocky superhero front and center with hilarious results, with director Chris McKay relying on the same kind of anarchic spirit and cutting-edge animation as the original cinematic outing. The spinoff was just the first in a series of big-screen features to bring Lego back to the multiplex.

Here, we recap the films that followed Emmet Brickowski's original excellent adventure.

The Lego Batman Movie (2017)

"What came out of *The Lego Movie* was the idea of, Batman's the Dark Knight, so why is he so moody? What's going on? Why is he so banged up? And wouldn't it be fun to get in there and explore that?" Arnett explained to *Entertainment Weekly*. Indeed, if anyone is ripe for therapy, it's Bruce Wayne's alter ego. The guy has some serious existential angst to unpack, and evidently, Lego was just the medium through which to explore his dark mojo.

Mining humor and heart from the mythology surrounding the crime fighter, screenwriter Seth Grahame-Smith (*Dark Shadows*) penned a narrative that sees Batman attempting to protect Gotham City from the machinations of famous villains unleashed by the crazed Joker (Zach Galifianakis). In this case, though, the Joker's actions are born not out of malice; rather, they're driven by heartbreak, after Batman refuses to acknowledge how important they are to each other.

"I love this idea that Joker feels like this little brother who wants to show up his older brother but can never quite beat him," director McKay told the *New York Times*. "Joker sees himself as the bad guy version of Batman.… We wanted Joker to be so vulnerable and look at them as having some kind of relationship. To have Batman deny that relationship like a bad boyfriend seemed like a lot of fun."

Working from the premise of a stoic Batman, the film gave him an adopted teenage son in Dick Grayson, aka Robin (Michael Cera), then forced the Caped Crusader to learn to ask for help and rely on others to save his beloved Gotham—and himself. "Sometimes what's funny is when Batman is at odds emotionally with what we think we know about him in our version," Arnett told *EW*. "We have moments where we make him a little bit insecure, and moments where you make him weirdly confident in ways he doesn't necessarily deserve to be."

Featuring a supporting cast that included Rosario Dawson as Barbara Gordon/Batgirl, Ralph Fiennes as loyal butler Alfred, and Mariah Carey as the mayor of Gotham City, *The Lego Batman Movie* earned $312 million worldwide, delighting Batman aficionados with dozens of comic-book Easter eggs interspersed throughout the movie (anyone remember Gentleman Ghost?).

Critics were impressed, too. The *Los Angeles Times*'s Justin Chang declared the film to be the best Batman movie since director Christopher Nolan's 2008 masterpiece *The Dark Knight*, while *Variety*'s Owen Gleiberman cheerfully noted, "*The Lego Batman Movie* is a helter-skelter lampoon in the daftly exhilarating spirit of *Mad* magazine and the *Naked Gun* films. It's that quick and cutthroat clever and self-knowing."

Garmadon and Master Wu tangled in a martial-arts minifigure showdown in The Lego Ninjago Movie.

The Lego Ninjago Movie (2017)

If *The Lego Movie* gleefully celebrated creativity and individuality and *The Lego Batman Movie* played comic-book movie tropes for laughs, *The Lego Ninjago Movie* hoped to capitalize on the popularity of the animated *Ninjago* TV series that ran from 2011 to 2019 on Cartoon Network with a breakneck martial-arts comedy.

Most directly appealing to fans of the show, the film is set in the same fictional world, a place called Ninjago, where young ninjas representing various elements (earth, air, fire, etc.) fight the forces of evil. The leader of the team, green ninja Lloyd (Dave Franco), happens to be the teenage son of the tyrannical Lord Garmadon, aka The Worst Guy Ever (Justin Theroux, delivering a gravel-voiced performance, Arnett-style). Lloyd's dad continuously attacks the city with monsters, hoping to install himself as ruler—leading to his son's ostracization at school.

Although the green ninja and his pals do their best to safeguard their home from Garmadon, they do run into trouble, with Lloyd at one point inadvertently summoning a giant live-action cat called Meowthra. Fortunately, he turns to the wise Master Wu (Jackie Chan) for guidance on feline wrangling.

According to directors Charlie Bean, Paul Fisher, and Bob Logan, famed martial-arts star Chan influenced the film's action scenes, with the animation team at Australia's Animal Logic choreographing sequences to match the legendary actor's fighting style. That, however, wasn't quite enough to propel the film to a strong performance.

The Lego Ninjago Movie, which opened in September 2017, ranks as the least successful brick-based big-screen effort to date, earning just $123 million at the international box office. Many critics bemoaned that the entry really did just feel like an extended ad for the company's Ninjago toy line, despite the filmmakers' efforts to home in on the father-son themes underpinning the story.

USA Today's Brian Truitt had one of the kinder notices, writing: "*Ninjago* strongly captures the same manically entertaining and often hilarious nature of its predecessors, though it lacks *The Lego Movie*'s originality and *The Lego Batman Movie*'s commitment to go-for-broke chaos.... *Lego Ninjago* sparkles with humor and kung fu style, yet it's a few pieces short of greatness."

The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part (2019)

With the release of *The Lego Movie,* filmmakers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller won praise for creating an action-packed "brickbuster" comedy featuring a star-studded cast and a super-catchy song. With *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part,* there seemed to be no need to deviate from that formula. So director Mike Mitchell (2016's *Trolls*) closely followed the blueprint with a snappy sequel starring fan-favorite characters and featuring a raft of surprising cameos. (Bruce Willis! Ruth Bader Ginsburg!) There's even a catchy song titled—wait for it—"Catchy Song," performed by D.J. Dillon Francis with vocals from T-Pain and That Girl Lay Lay.

Written by Lord and Miller, *The Second Part* picks up immediately following the events of the first movie, with Lego Duplo invaders landing in the city of Bricksburg. They've soon turned the once-thriving metropolis into a *Mad Max*–style desert wasteland, leaving heroes Emmet (Chris Pratt), Wyldstyle (Elizabeth Banks), Batman (Arnett), and Unikitty (Alison Brie) to vainly

The Lego Movie 2 *voice cast (from left): Elizabeth Banks (Wyldstyle), Tiffany Haddish (Queen Watevra Wa'Nabi), Chris Pratt (Emmet), Alison Brie (Unikitty), and Will Arnett (Batman).*

attempt to reassemble some kind of civilization. Things then go from bad to worse when Emmet's pals are kidnapped and taken to the Systar System, an intergalactic realm ruled over by the shape-shifting Queen Watevra Wa'Nabi (Tiffany Haddish). She says she wants to unite the worlds by marrying Batman, but it's impossible to tell if she's sincere.

Launching a rescue mission, Emmet is thrown off course after he encounters "galaxy-defender, archaeologist, cowboy, and raptor trainer" Rex Dangervest (Pratt, lampooning his other blockbuster appearances in a dual role). Unbeknownst to the trusting Emmet, Rex's motives really are suspect and threaten to hasten the arrival of the dreaded "Armamageddon."

As it had the first time out, Animal Logic took steps to ensure that every setting, prop, and character in the film appeared to be made from Lego, and just as before, the story included a live-action sequence connecting the narrative back to the real-world. Here, in the place of Will Ferrell's Man Upstairs, the audience met his wife, played by Maya Rudolph. Frustrated with the constant bickering between her son, Finn (*The Lego Movie*'s Jadon Sand), and daughter, Bianca (Brooklynn Prince), she threatens to throw all their toys in a storage bin—or, as it's described in Emmet's world, an alternate dimension known as the "Bin of Stau-rajj."

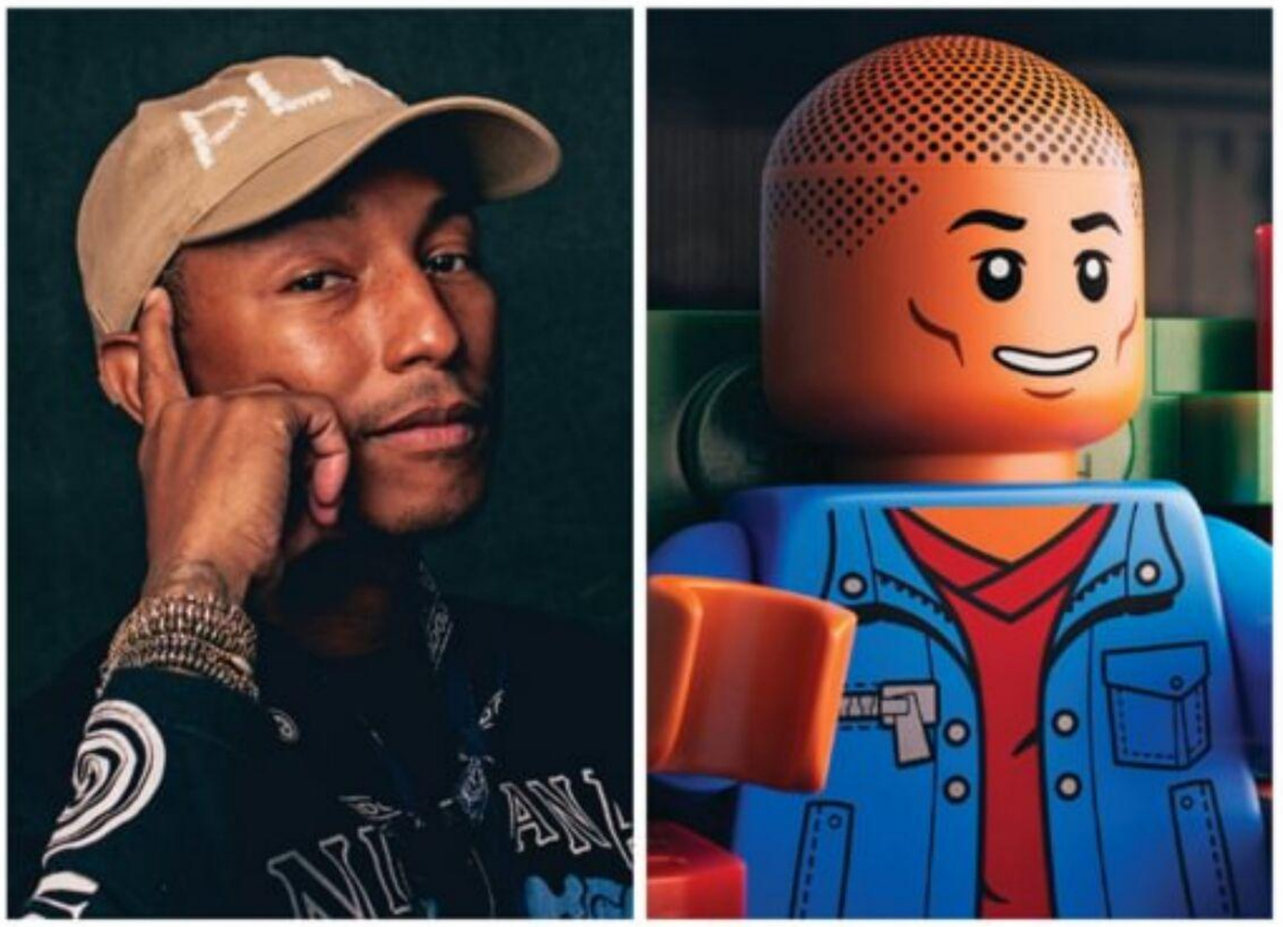
Still, despite the visual gags and multlcolored spectacle, when *The Second Part* was released in February 2019, it didn't garner the same sort of adoration as its predecessor. It earned nearly $200 million at the worldwide box office and left disappointed reviewers wanting something a little bit more awesome.

Writing in the *New York Times*, critic Manohla Dargis observed: "*The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part* isn't as distractingly fun, shiny, and bright as the more satisfying franchise installments. It drags and sometimes bores, which makes it easier for your mind to drift elsewhere, to thoughts of family, deadlines, chores, the creative impoverishment of the big studios, and the casual, fundamentally corrupt commercial exploitation of the child audience." □

Pharrell in Lego

The musician tells his life story in a vibrant animated film.

BY GINA McINTYRE



Williams (in real life and in Lego form) says playing with Lego as a kid helped inspire his creativity.

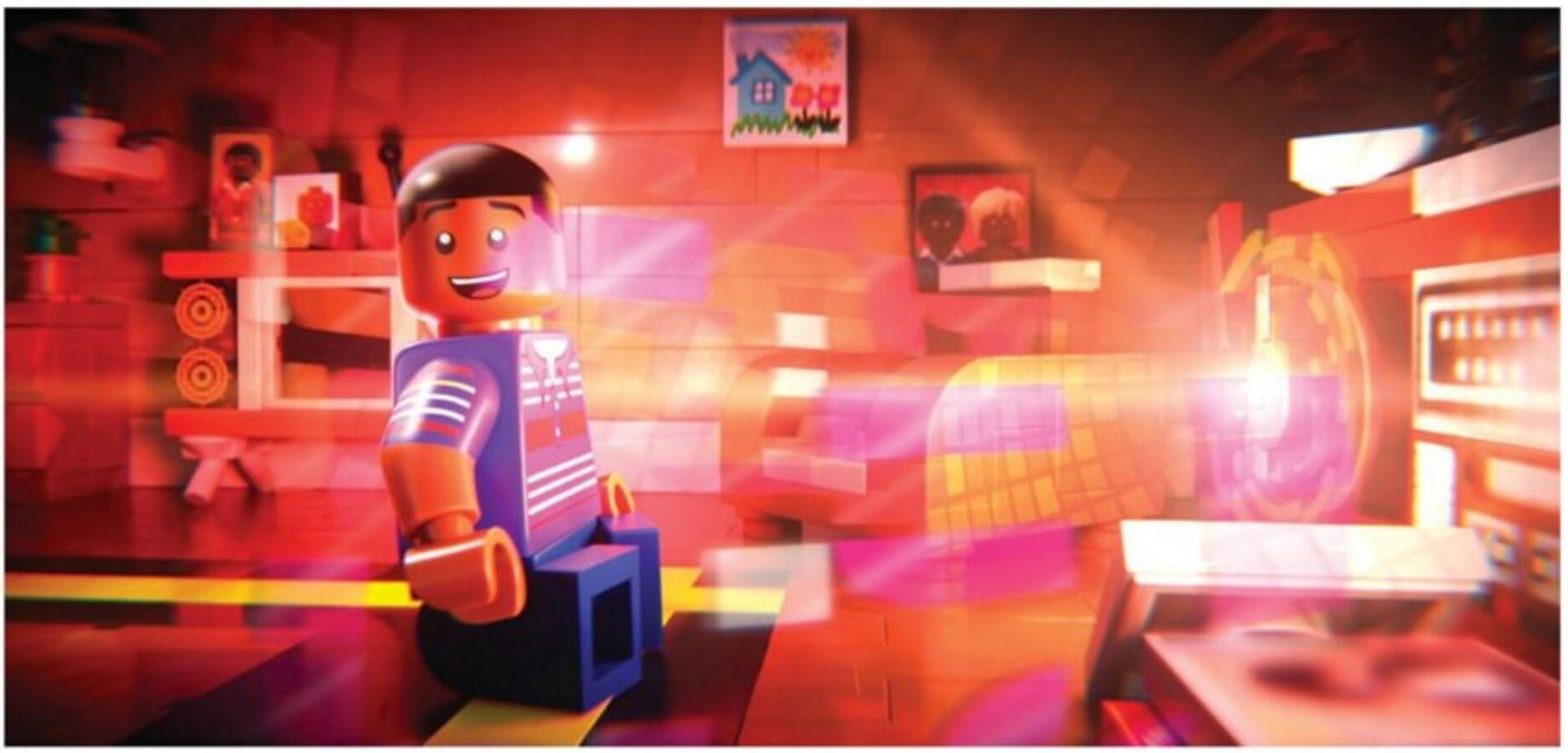
Leave it to Pharrell Williams to find the most original way possible to tell his life story—with Lego.

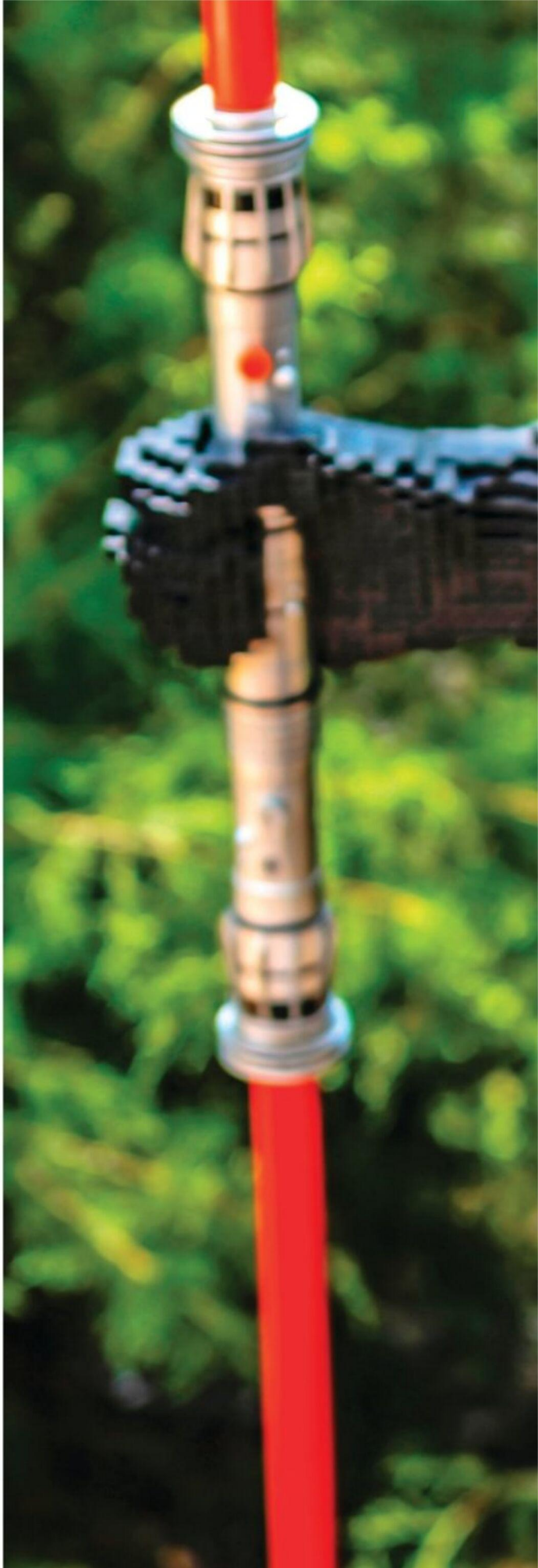
With the new animated film *Piece by Piece*, the 13-time Grammy Award–winning songwriter, producer, and performer relates the details of his childhood and the early days of his career, chronicling his path to entertainment industry stardom. The film features the voices of many of the musical superstars he encounters during his rise to fame, including Gwen Stefani, Kendrick Lamar, Timbaland, Snoop Dogg, Justin Timberlake, Busta Rhymes, and Jay-Z.

No stranger to the world of filmmaking, Williams has received two Academy Award nominations, for his original song "Happy" from 2013's *Despicable Me 2* and for producing 2016's *Hidden Figures*, a best picture nominee; in 2018, he narrated *The Grinch*, the most recent update of the Dr. Seuss holiday classic. Still, *Piece by Piece* represents an important milestone, with Williams both writing and taking on the lead role.

The busy multi-hyphenate began mulling the idea of a biography about five years ago, reaching out to documentary filmmaker Morgan Neville to gauge his interest in a collaboration. Neville was a natural choice, given his long history of making nonfiction features about music and musicians, including *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*; *Muddy Waters: Can't Be Satisfied*; *Johnny Cash's America*; and 2013's Oscar-winning portrait of professional backup singers, *20 Feet from Stardom*.

Both agreed that Lego was the ideal way to re-create the triumphs of Williams' creative life. "What we made is not like any other movie," Neville told *Variety* about his partnership with Williams. "People can try and label it. It's just its own film. It's mind-blowing, in a way, the freedom that we were able to put together in the film, but that only works if you're channeling your subject."





A FORCE AWAKENS

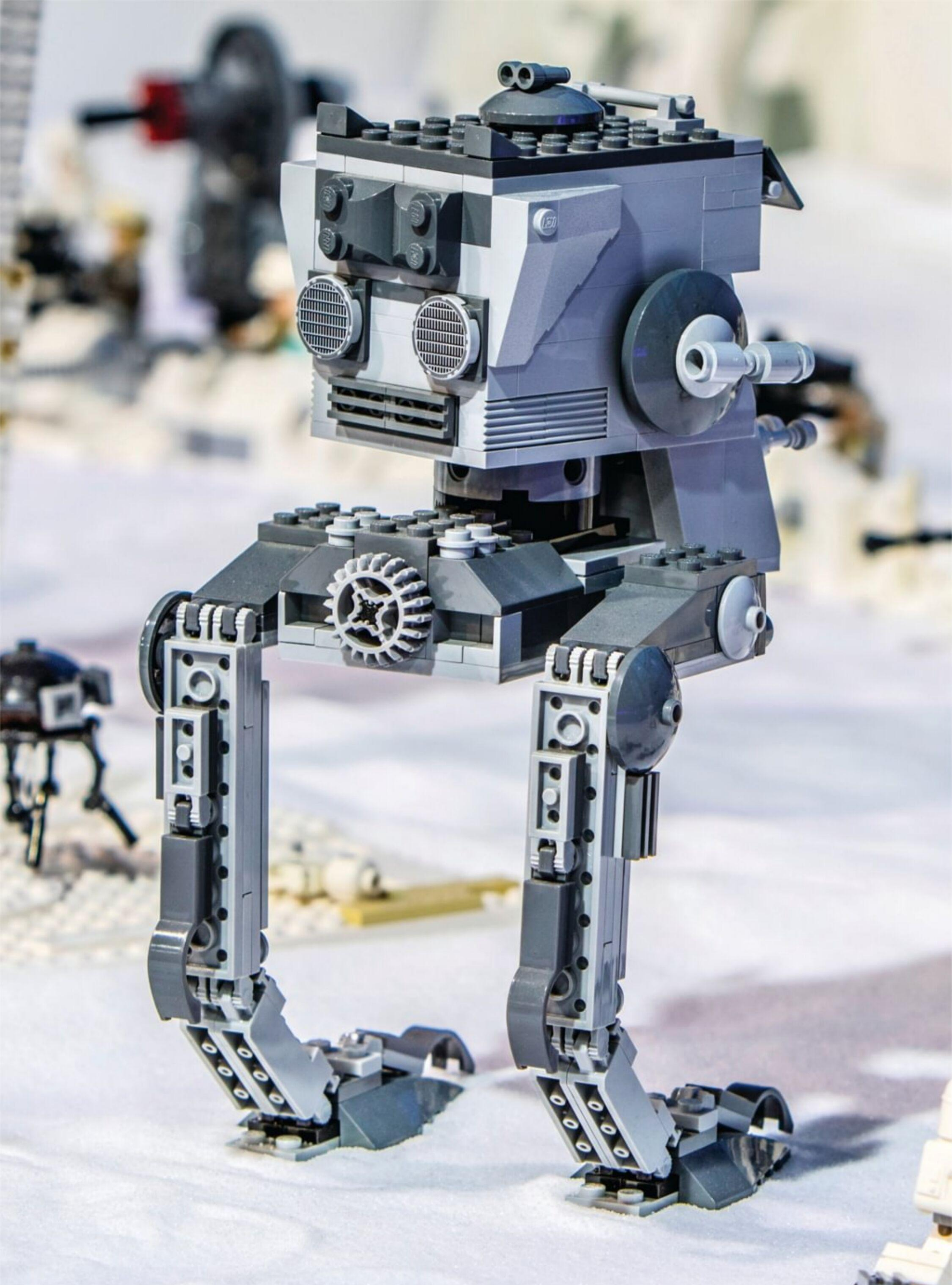
Lego executives were originally hesitant to partner with Star Wars, but their union has led to one of pop culture's most successful licensing deals.

BY RICH SANDS

A LONG TIME AGO, IN A BOARDROOM FAR, FAR away, a Lego executive tried to persuade his bosses that a partnership with one of the greatest pop culture franchises of all time would help provide a new hope to the ailing company. In the late 1990s, Lego was struggling to deal with the shifting playtime habits of children and rising competition (especially from video games). Peter Eio, Lego's head of operations in the Americas at the time, suggested to the company's leaders in Denmark that a licensing alliance with Star Wars would boost sales faster than Han Solo could pilot the Millennium Falcon through the Kessel Run. Star Wars was, after all, already one of the most successful licenses across the entire retail industry, including action figures, playsets, lightsabers, and infinite types of merchandise.

To Eio's surprise, however, his idea was not well received. "For proud, self-sufficient Lego, the

A life-size version of Darth Maul made of Lego strikes a menacing pose at Legoland Florida.



The sets and minifigures are based on movies (including The Empire Strikes Back, *opposite,* Attack of the Clones, *above, and* A New Hope, *bottom) and TV series (*The Mandalorian, *below).*

notion that it should license another outfit's intellectual property, even if the partner was an unstoppable hit maker such as Lucasfilm, was repugnant," wrote David C. Robertson in his 2013 book *Brick by Brick: How Lego Rewrote the Rules of Innovation and Conquered the Global Toy Industry*. "So was the fact that if Lego licensed Star Wars, it would have to play by Hollywood's rules."

Another roadblock was that the very nature of the property was seen as conflicting with Lego's longtime core principle of shielding children from the horrors of warfare. "Even today," Robertson wrote, "Lego continues to embrace one of founder Ole Kirk Christiansen's core values: to never let war seem like child's play. Lego executives who opposed the deal feared that by aligning the company's squeaky-clean reputation with the Star Wars brand, it might well diminish its own."

While Eio and the Lucasfilm team may have found the Danes' lack of faith disturbing, they didn't give up, and armed with focus-group research that indicated parental approval for a Lego/Star Wars union, they were able to convince then president and CEO Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen (a Star Wars fan himself) to greenlight the deal.

The line launched in 1999, following the release of the first new Star Wars film in 16 years, *The Phantom Menace*. Thirteen sets were introduced that year, based on both the original trilogy and the new movie. The minifigure for Jar Jar Binks was the first ever to have its own unique head sculpt, and the first Lego-fied lightsaber battle between a Jedi and a Sith involved Qui-Gon Jinn and Darth Maul.

Over the years, close to 700 different Star Wars sets have been released, often putting a whimsical touch on an intellectual property that had not historically been known for being irreverent. Lego does not release specific sales figures, but the company has annually singled out Star Wars as one of its top-selling lines. The success of the toys helped pave the way for other Lego licensing deals, including Harry Potter, Jurassic Park/Jurassic World, Marvel, and DC. "Star Wars, you know, allowed us to really open up people's eyes to how Lego can create humor and charm to an [intellectual property] that might not exist," Jill Wilfert, head of global entertainment partners and content at Lego, told CNBC. "We found that most of the IP owners are pretty willing to kind of let us play a little bit."

Lego has put a whimsical touch on an intellectual property that had not historically been known for being irreverent.

Although the toys are the driving force of the Lego/Star Wars collaboration, there have been several extensions in video games and CG-animated TV specials, series, and shorts. The most recent game, *Lego Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*, a playful adventure through the nine core films that was released in April 2022, had 5 million players in its first two months and was the fifth best-selling game of the year.

Kid-friendly TV specials and shorts have had clever titles such as *Revenge of the Brick* and *The Padawan Menace* and featured popular characters like R2-D2 and C-3PO. Their success ultimately led

In the kid-friendly Lego Star Wars Holiday Special, *a time-traveling Rey has a lightsaber showdown with a before-her-time Darth Vader. Opposite: Luke Skywalker (left) made an appearance on the TV series* Lego Star Wars: The Freemaker Adventures.

to a more traditional animated TV series, *Lego Star Wars: The Freemaker Adventures*, which ran for two seasons on the Disney XD network from 2016 to 2017. It featured a trio of orphaned siblings who scavenge and sell parts for destroyed ships during the time between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. The show included appearances by Star Wars favorites Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, Princess Leia, Lando Calrissian, and Boba Fett. And, of course, a series of Lego sets based on the show were sold.

That was followed in 2018 by *Lego Star Wars: All-Stars*, a series of shorts and episodes that spanned the entire range of the Skywalker Saga and featured all the key players. Since then, the Disney+ streaming service has been the home of several CG-animated adaptations, including *Lego Star Wars Holiday Special* in 2020, *Lego Star Wars Terrifying Tales* in 2021, and, most recently, *Lego Star Wars: Rebuild the Galaxy*. Another fanciful interpretation of the property, the four-part special features a nerf-herder (voiced by *Stranger Things* star Gaten Matarazzo) who encounters a mixed-up universe where good and evil are flipped, including a Sith Lord version of Jar Jar Binks.

Through it all, the toys have been (pardon the pun) the force behind the initiative. Sets for all age levels have been released, including some of the most ambitious and popular Lego kits ever. In fact, when asked what would be his first major purchase after signing a four-year, $55 million rookie contract with the San Antonio Spurs, NBA star Victor Wembanyama singled out the 7,541-piece Millennium Falcon set that sells for $849.99.

And, of course, those Lego executives who initially scoffed at the idea have no doubt enjoyed profits only a bounty hunter could dream of. The current licensing deal runs through 2032, and to turn a popular Star Wars saying on its head—we have a *good* feeling about this. ◻

A POP CULTURE POWERHOUSE

From the Lord of the Rings franchise to *Friends*, Lego has worked its magic on fan-favorite movies and TV shows.

Ghostbusters

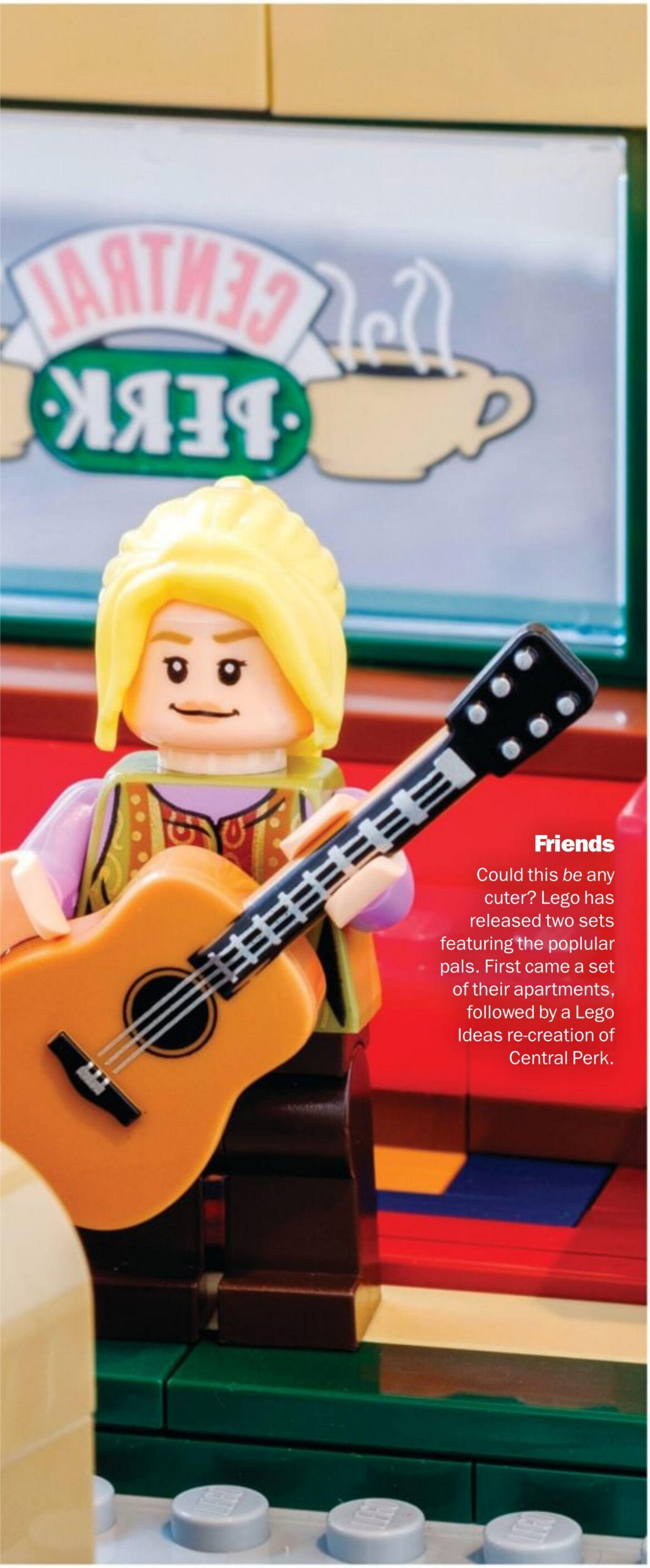
Who you gonna call to help build the sets for the Ecto-1 vehicle, which have included paranormal detectives from the franchise, both classic and more recent?

Marvel

Avengers assembled! The MCU's superheroes—including Captain Marvel, the Hulk, and Spider-Man—have been featured in dozens of sets, including a three-foot-tall Avengers Tower, a life-size version of Captain America's shield, and a replica of Wolverine's adamantium claws based on the *X-Men '97* cartoon.

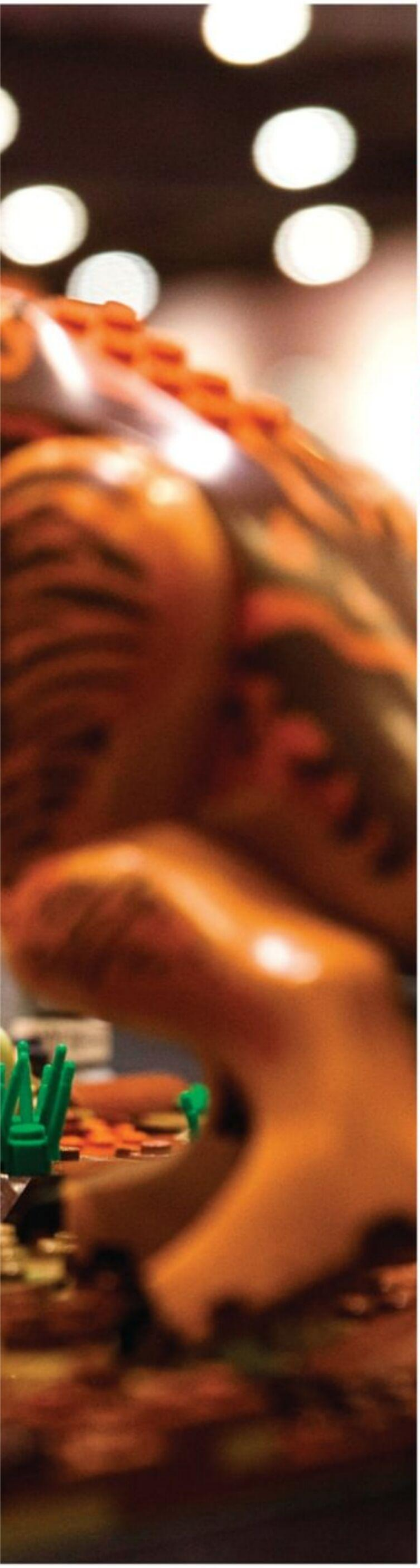
The Lord of the Rings

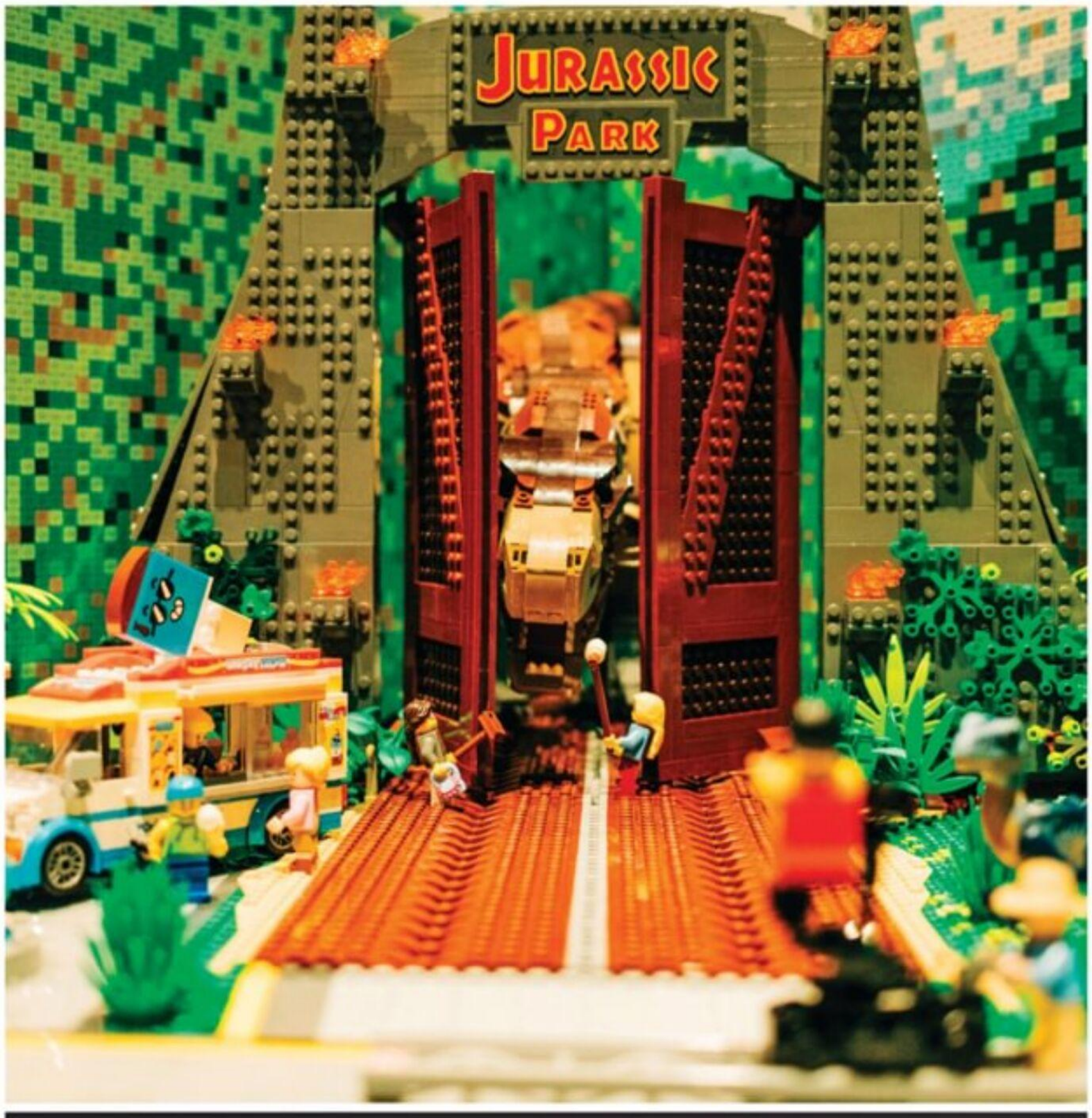
Since 2012, fans of J.R.R. Tolkien's fantastical saga have been on a quest to re-create Middle-earth, complete with elves, dwarves, humans, and their enemies. The most recent set, released in 2024, is a 5,471-piece build of Barad-Dûr, aka Sauron's fortress of evil.



Friends

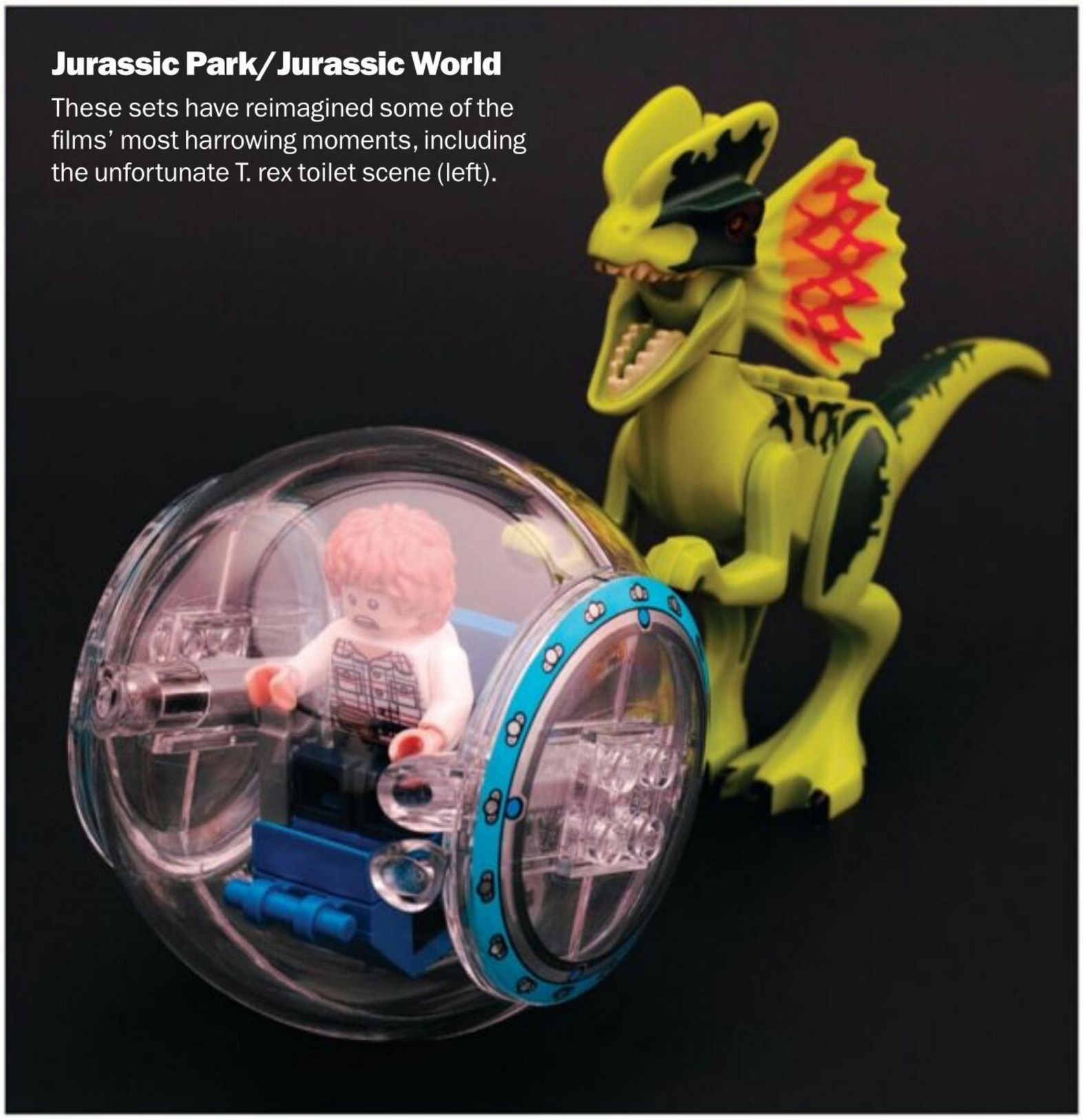
Could this *be* any cuter? Lego has released two sets featuring the poplular pals. First came a set of their apartments, followed by a Lego Ideas re-creation of Central Perk.





Jurassic Park/Jurassic World

These sets have reimagined some of the films' most harrowing moments, including the unfortunate T. rex toilet scene (left).



↑

Doctor Who

A character who is able to continuously regenerate into new forms is a perfect fit for the versatile world of Lego. A *Doctor Who* set was released in 2015, and the Twelfth Doctor (pictured) appeared in the toys-to-life video game *Lego Dimensions*.

↓

The Simpsons

The residents of Springfield have been given the Lego treatment in stores and on TV. A 2014 episode of *The Simpsons*, titled "Brick Like Me" (below), saw Homer transported to an alternate reality made of Lego, "where everything fits together and no one gets hurt." Turns out it was a dream brought on by Homer's anxiety that Lisa was outgrowing their daddy-daughter time building Lego-like toys together.

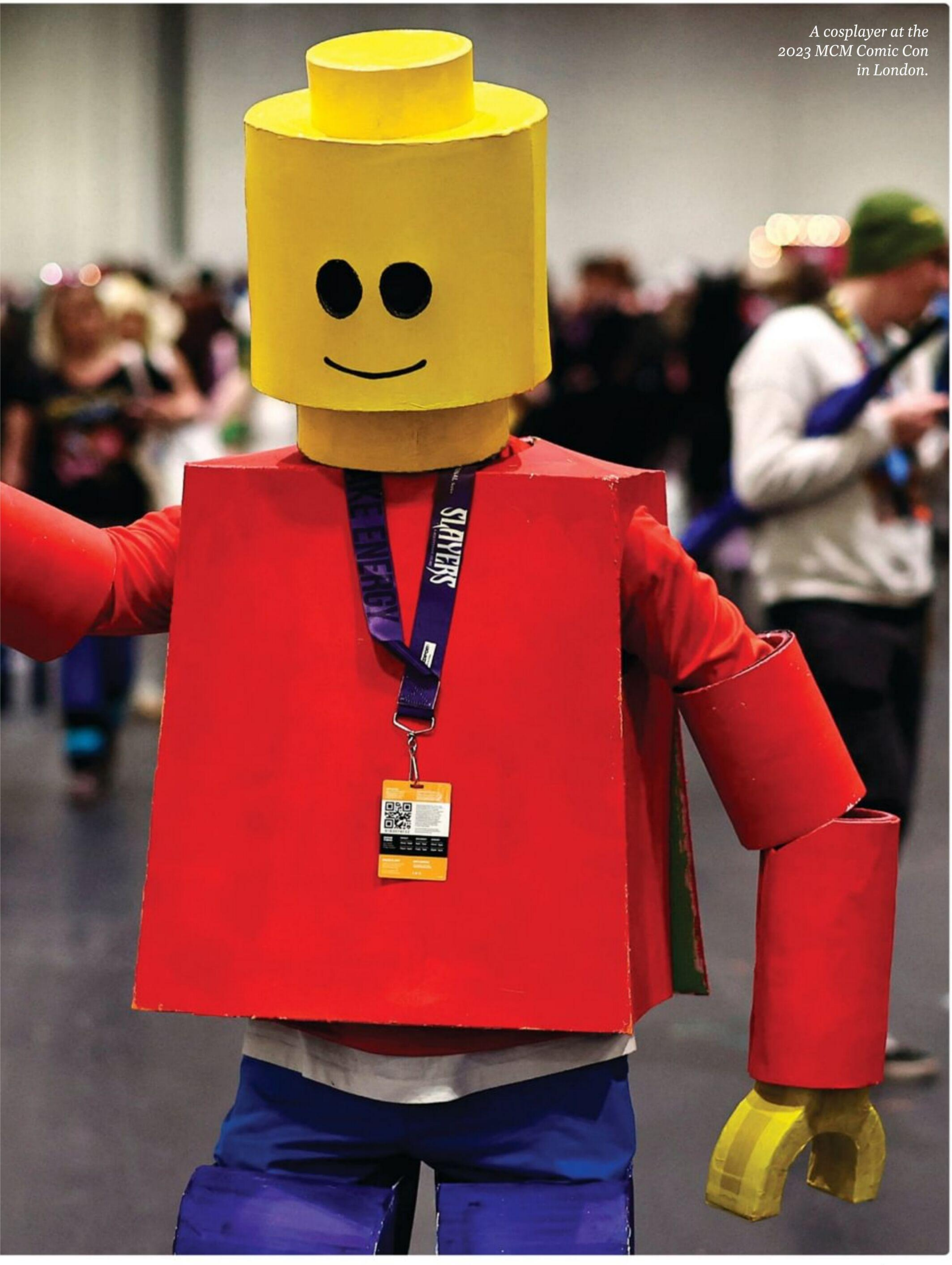
The Big Bang Theory

A winning fan creation from Lego Ideas, this set featured the brainy nerds of the hit sitcom in Leonard and Sheldon's apartment. Try sitting someone other than Sheldon in his spot on the couch if you dare. Bazinga!

CHAPTER 3

THE FANDOM

Lego has inspired fans of all ages to express their creativity and share their passion for the brand.



A cosplayer at the 2023 MCM Comic Con in London.

Bricksie's city build grew so big he had to move it to a dedicated studio. On YouTube (opposite), he reviews new products and shows off his work.

BUILDING A FOLLOWING

Superfans are tapping into a passionate community by showing off their creativity and indulging nostalgia.

BY ASHLEY ABRAMSON

WHILE HE REMEMBERS PLAYING WITH LEGO AS A youngster, Jordan Forsythe was 24 years old when he bought and built his first set as a way to cope with work-related stress. He soon found a passion for the toys and began sharing his builds on Instagram, and in 2017, he branched out to other social media channels. Now, the 33-year-old from Edmonton, Alberta, who goes by Bricksie, posts daily Lego videos for his audience of nearly 430,000 YouTube subscribers.

For influencers like Bricksie, sharing Lego content on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok isn't just a hobby—it's often a full-time job. Many of these superfan creators have amassed millions of followers who routinely tune in to watch them explore the toys—and perhaps glean a bit of inspiration for their own builds.

Bricksie ultimately left his full-time job managing his family's toy and collectible store, and he currently logs about 60 hours a week on the YouTube channel, whether building off-camera or filming and editing his day-in-the-life-style videos. His most popular videos are updates he films of his Lego city, a massive urban layout complete with a boardwalk, amusement park, campground, and even a Starbucks. He uses a mix of sets and "free builds," designing and building on his own rather than following official Lego instructions.

The ambitious project originally started in his basement, but he recently moved to a larger production space outside his home. The city grid is three times bigger in the new space, and Bricksie has big dreams to fill all the "white space" in the

grid—but finding time to build is hard when you're also managing one of the most popular Lego channels on YouTube.

Bricksie typically creates and posts seven videos a week, but other creators focus on depth rather than breadth. Brick Technology, a creator whose YouTube bio reads "I push Lego to its limits," has more than 1.7 million subscribers who follow his science and engineering feats.

In 2022, the creator crafted a fully operational drum machine out of Lego Technic pieces, which are more complicated parts that create models of machines, such as cars and other vehicles. Brick Technology has also showcased a working hydraulic excavator, a wind-powered train, and a card-shooting tank.

Other creators focus more on entertaining content. One YouTuber known as SacredBricks, who has 1.2 million subscribers, makes complex animated videos to entertain fellow fans. His most popular content to date is a 15-minute stop-motion war that tells a cohesive story while showcasing his highly detailed creations.

One of the most followed Lego creators, TDBricks, has more than 5 million YouTube subscribers. His bio says he "loves building crazy things and telling fun stories using Lego. I want to prove that Lego isn't just a toy for kids. You're never too old to have fun." TD's most popular video, of a Lego amusement park, has nearly 100 million views. He also taps into pop culture, building characters from *Stranger Things* and constructing villages from the video game *Minecraft*.

No matter their niche, creators can share—and monetize—their content on other platforms, including TikTok and Instagram. Some start dedicated Lego accounts, while others unexpectedly go viral after posting builds on their personal accounts. In May 2024, NBC News reported on a trend of Black women sharing their Lego collections on TikTok using the hashtag #BlackGirlsDoLego. One video, depicting user @lexirielle showing off multiple Lego builds—including a model of a Polaroid camera, an A-frame house, and several cars—has more than 9 million views. "I think this video might've just kickstarted my new hobby," commented one inspired TikTok user.

Keeping up with audience demand and creating new, appealing content can be time-consuming. In a 2023 interview, SacredBricks told Business Insider his animations can take up to 150 hours to complete. According to Brick Technology, a single video can require months of production, depending on the complexity of the idea. "Recently, I focus on quality over quantity, so one video can take one to three months," he says. "I want to give viewers the best experience and make every second count."

The hard work is often worthwhile. For creators with this many viewers, social media can be quite lucrative. YouTube's earning model is based on number of views and time spent watching videos, so going viral can be a recipe for financial success. Some creators mix platforms to maximize incomes, while others home in on one. For example, while Bricksie has 1.5 million followers on TikTok—and he says it's easier to build a following on that platform—YouTube is his primary source of income, because Canadians don't have access to the TikTok Creator Fund that allows influencers to earn money on their content.

Social media can be lucrative for Lego content creators. Going viral can be a recipe for financial success.

Lego content creators get started for different reasons. Some, like Bricksie, take a chance and set out to monetize a hobby they're passionate about. Brick Technology says he always wanted a creative career, and he was inspired by other YouTubers to start his own channel. "My first video got 10,000 subscribers and over a million views in a few weeks," he says, citing a combination of luck and prior YouTube experience.

Other Lego creators have found virality—and a sense of belonging—more unexpectedly. "I didn't expect it to go the way that it did," creator @uhleesuh01, who went viral for sharing her builds on TikTok, told NBC News. "I didn't expect to find a sense of community, because Legos as a hobby is a non-POC, male-dominated hobby. So when I saw other women of color posting about it, of all different ages, it warmed my heart."

Some creators work primarily on their own, while others take advantage of Lego's Ambassador Network, which recognizes creators who meet certain criteria (these creators, including Bricksie, sometimes receive free sets to review for their followers).

Brick Technology's custom builds include working vehicles and a train that his cats can ride.

The program also connects fans without followings through an online community and in-person gatherings where members can share their builds.

As for why Lego content appeals to so many viewers, SacredBricks cites nostalgia as a primary reason. "Kids who are growing older now played with Lego a lot as a kid and watch my videos to feel nostalgic," he told Business Insider. "Lego is something many people can relate to." The content also lets people enjoy the toys without having to own all of the sets themselves. "Kids are limited by how many Legos they have, and adults are limited by time," says Brick Technology. "Since this is my job, I don't have those limits, and I can try things most people sadly can't, like building a cat-size Lego train or racing Lego cars on a treadmill."

Every channel has a different appeal. Bricksie thinks his videos are popular because he's adopted a broader approach that appeals to a wide audience of people who find the content both entertaining and useful in their own builds.

While monetizing a hobby or finding social media fame may seem glamorous, being a Lego creator comes with challenges, too—just like any other career. Bricksie took a big risk leaving his full-time job for the channel, and now he has to balance 60 hours of work each week with his personal life, which includes parenting two young children. Plus, for any online creator, there's always the fear of trolls in the comment section—though Bricksie says his viewers are primarily supportive. "You'll get riddled with negativity no matter what," he says. "It's 98 percent positive in my comment section, and people love what I do. It's fun for me to do, too." ◻

Masters of the Lego Domain

On the *Lego Masters* TV show, contestants show off their creativity through extravagant and fantastical builds.

BY LAUREN HUFF

Since premiering in 2020, the American version of the hit U.K. competition show *Lego Masters* has showcased some of the most creative builders. On the Fox series, teams of two are tasked with creating original builds based on weekly themes, including engineering and architectural structures, surreal mash-ups, and pop-culture favorites (Star Wars, Jurassic World, Marvel). A fifth season—with host Will Arnett, aka Lego Batman—is scheduled to premiere during the 2024–25 television season.

In the first year, newlywed couple Tyler and Amy Clites won the $100,000 first-place prize with their elaborate "Treasure of the Griffin" build, featuring a mythological matriarch protecting her young from a giant lizard. Here are some other memorable creations from that season of the series.

"Spaceland"

This theme park built around the site of a UFO crash by friends Aaron and Christian was the winner of the first episode, and for good reason. The massive Ferris wheel was impressive in scope, and both it and the roller coaster moved flawlessly. The little details—aliens, a mini Arnett in Lego form—fit the theme well and told a full story.

"The Sacrifice"

In episode 2, it was Tyler and Amy's aptly named build that most astonished viewers (and the judges). Made to be destroyed per that episode's theme ("Space Smash"), their massive space alien featured movable curved tentacles and a well-built hero dropping a bomb straight into its mouth. The piece was destroyed perfectly, with the bomb falling right into the alien's mouth just before it all crumbled, as designed.

"Mermaid"

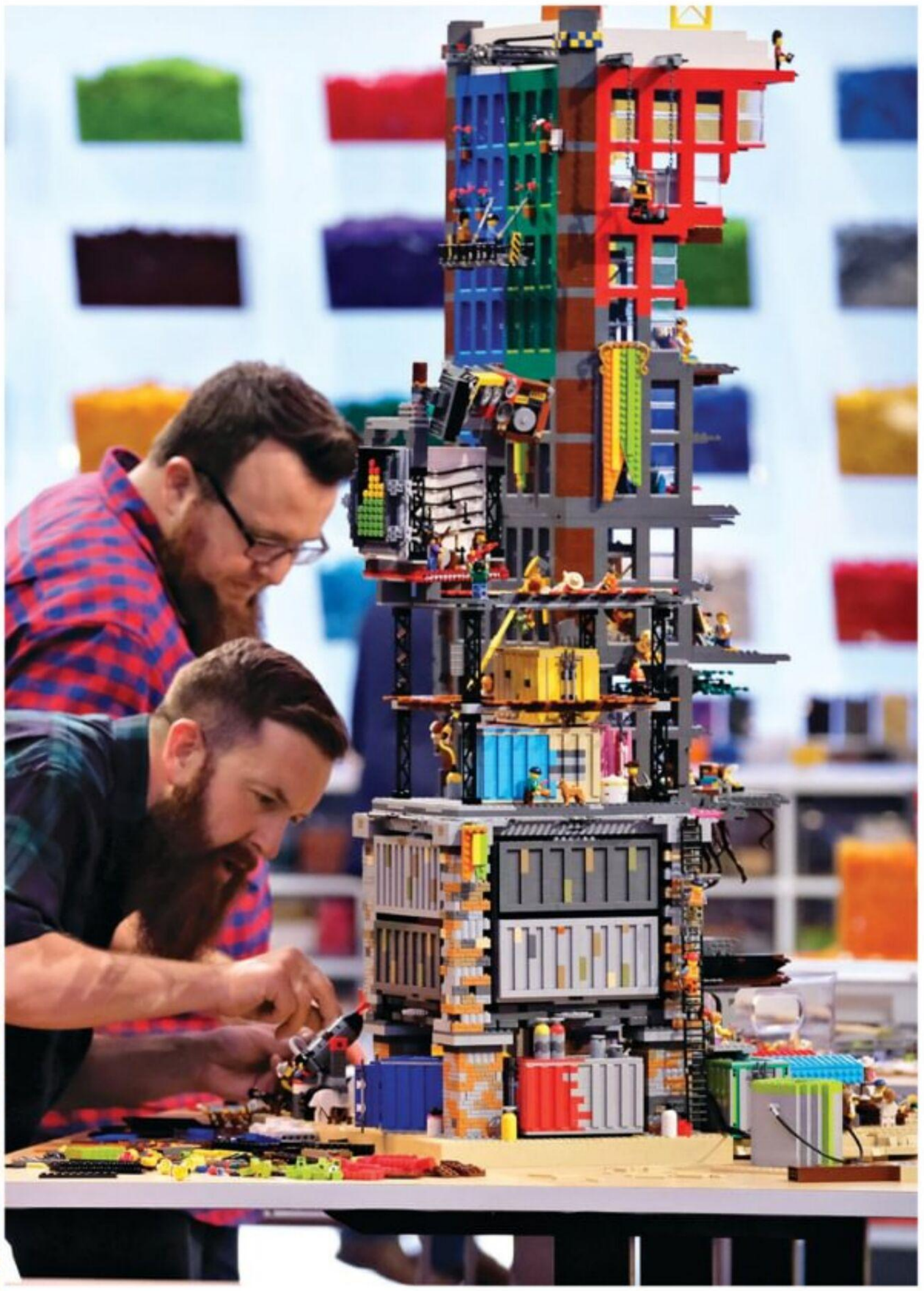
Friends Sam and Jessica overcame their issues earlier in the season to produce this beauty. Their task was to create the other half of an item—in this case, a fire hydrant—and tell a story with it. From all angles, their build shone with color and depth. They went the extra mile by adding little under-the-sea details, such as sea turtles and seahorses, which brought this aquatic world to life.

"Clockwork Man"

Also in the "Cut in Half" episode, married couple Richard and Flynn came up with "Clockwork Man," which featured a village assembled beneath a clock. The eyes and clock ticked in tandem, and the smile of the man fit perfectly next to the half of a clock the builders had to work with. The theme was flawlessly realized and the sculpting work was excellent, making this creation the clear winner of the episode.

"Attack on Sustainable City"

Perhaps the most impressive thing about this build is that it exists at all. In one of the season's most dramatic moments, Aaron and Christian's take on a sustainable city came crashing down just as they were wheeling it out at the end of the challenge. Luckily for them, the Lego gods had a trick up their sleeve: All of the builders were given an extra four hours to add a monster element to their cities. Not only were Aaron and Christian able to build back all of the height of their original design, but they added a towering smog monster too. Each floor of their tower had details that



Mark (foreground) and Boone were the runners-up with "Artopia," their colossal vision for a community of artists. Left: Amy and Tyler were crowned champions thanks to their "Treasure of the Griffin" creation.

worked with the story. There was even a fully functioning elevator and wind turbines that spun, helping to make this creation a structural wonder of Lego magic.

"EZ-PZ"

Of the three Star Wars–inspired droids built in the show's semifinals, Amy and Tyler's was the one that stood out. EZ-PZ is a Cantina droid serving Wookiee cookies and blue milk to his patrons, and he actually looked like he was taken straight out of the Star Wars universe. The adorable little guy, with his rounded head and wide-set eyes, was nervous because it was his first day on the job, and the tray wobbled accordingly. Despite having major issues during the building phase, Amy and Tyler managed to create a fully movable and memorable droid just in the nick of time.

"Artopia"

Although Tyler and Amy's build ultimately won, Mark and Boone's creation in the season finale was the winner in our hearts. Not only was the bearded buddies' structure—an artists' commune built in a post-apocalyptic wasteland—one of the most remarkable in size, but it had the technical aspects and story to boot. They created a paintbrush that activated the walls to turn, completely reinventing the build in the process. It was creative, immersive, colorful, and an overall Lego masterpiece.

The "Starry Night" set has 2,316 pieces (including a minifigure of Vincent van Gogh) and brings the painting to life in 3D.

FAN CREATIONS COME TO LIFE

The Lego Ideas program gives everyday builders the chance to design a set that just might end up on store shelves.

BY COURTNEY MIFSUD INTREGLIA

Successful fan-designed sets include a re-creation of the climactic scene from the 1975 blockbuster Jaws *and a classic red London telephone box (opposite).*

ACCORDING TO JONNY CAMPBELL, WHO WORKS IN government finance in Northern Ireland, every Lego fan shares the same dream: seeing a set that they've designed sold in a store, and watching someone else take it home. For Campbell, that dream was realized in the summer of 2024 when the company released his *Jaws*-themed set for the masses as part of the company's Lego Ideas platform, where fan designers and builders can submit ideas and prototypes to be turned into official sets. "It is just mind-blowing that my design is now an official Lego set," Campbell said. "I can't wait to stand in a Lego shop looking at the shelves and seeing a set that I have been involved with, and watching someone buying it."

In the early to mid-2000s, after years of being in financial peril, the Lego Group sought to focus more on its highly devoted consumers. In 2008, the company partnered with the Japanese crowdsourcing platform CUUSOO and created a portal that allowed fan designers to submit ideas for new products. As part of this program in Japan, if an idea received 1,000 supporters, a company review board would consider turning it into an official Lego product. In 2011, the CUUSOO website launched globally, and the threshold of supporters needed for success increased to 10,000. By 2014, there were half a million Lego Ideas members, which necessitated a more robust platform with better functionality and more features.

A creator who successfully convinces 10,000 voters and the Lego Group that their homemade set should be realized will see their design mass-produced and earn 1 percent of sales. But those two hurdles can be daunting. Currently, there are more than 2,500 product ideas on the portal inching toward the fan benchmark. "In all honesty, I never thought one of my projects would get to 10k," Campbell said in an interview with the Lego Ideas blog in 2021, the year he joined the "10K Club." "I posted my project on a few Lego-related and *Jaws*-related Facebook pages and a few Reddit groups. I did notice that throughout the gathering support phase, lots of people shared my project, which I'm sure went a long way to help it achieve the support needed."

That isn't always enough, though. Marc Corfmat, a graduate student in mechanical engineering at the University of California, Davis, had thought he met the threshold twice. In 2023, he cleared the 10,000-vote hurdle with a design based on the cartoon series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Another design of his,

TELEPHONE
BUILDMORE ROAD SC1
CITY OF BRICKSTON

based on the film *The Polar Express,* hit 10,000 votes the following year. But despite the wealth of support, Lego rejected both ideas. "We knew it was almost impossible to get products on the shelves. You see maybe a few selected a year out of thousands of submissions," Corfmat told the Verge in 2023. "But even that slight glimmer of hope was enough to really keep going."

In 2023, Corfmat decided to try one more idea: a rendering of the original 1977 Polaroid OneStep. "All the angles were lining up perfectly, everything was working," he said. "It very quickly became apparent to me that I was falling in love with this thing." In under two weeks, Corfmat's submission earned the "staff pick" nod, and it hit the 10,000-supporters barrier in less than two months. This time, Lego reached out to produce the set.

Throughout production, the company has teams working directly with designers, including a safety

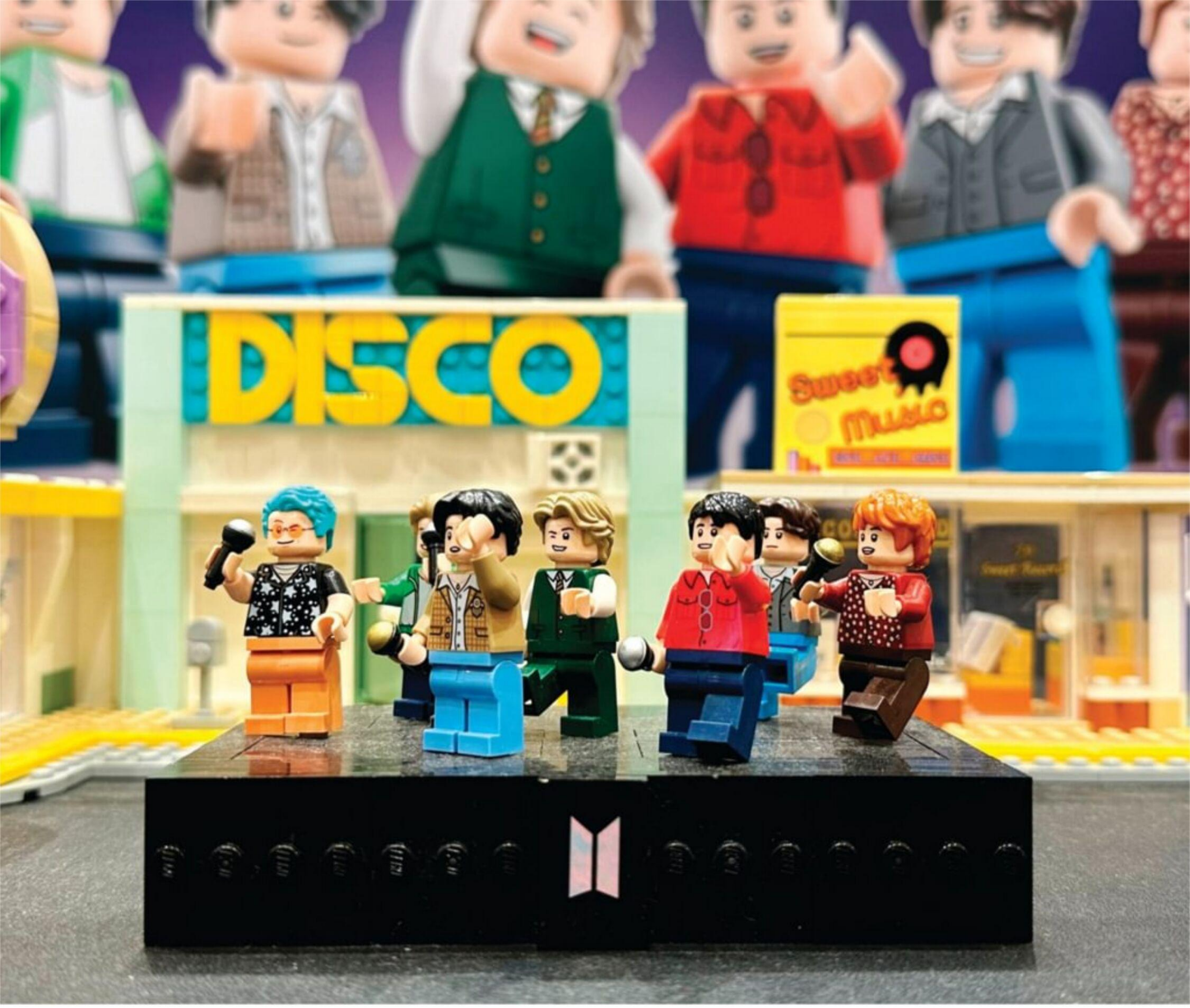
"I can't wait to stand in a Lego shop looking at the shelves and seeing a set I have been involved with, and watching someone buying it."

–BUILDER JONNY CAMPBELL

department, a function testing department, and a building instructions department. They make sure that the process of building these toys remains fun, the instructions are easy enough to follow, and the model stays stable enough that there's only a minor chance that it falls apart while you build it. Corfmat says that once his idea was approved, he was not consulted during the production process. The Lego team largely took his idea and ran with it, then showed him the final results. When the Polaroid OneStep SX-70 Camera set was released in January 2024, he received 10 free copies in addition to his 1 percent cut of sales.

While it may seem daunting to present an entirely original pitch to Lego, sometimes the company will pitch ideas directly to the builders. In 2022, Lego turned to its fan community and gave builders a directive to design a Dungeons & Dragons–themed

Ambitious sets from Lego Ideas include (clockwise from top left) an A-frame cabin, a tree house, and an old fishing store.



K-pop supergroup BTS got the Lego Ideas treatment.

set to celebrate the tabletop game's upcoming 50th anniversary. A panel of judges selected five submissions for a shortlist, and in a vote, fans chose the design of Amsterdam-based environmental artist Lucas Bolt. "I spent two very intense weeks working on it, every night, every weekend, all the time that I had," he said.

Inspired by Bolt's design, the 3,745-piece set features a tavern with a removable roof, a dungeon, a tower, and of course, a massive red dragon. "Lucas' design perfectly captured the storytelling excitement of any Dungeons & Dragons game," said Lego design manager Jordan Scott.

In April 2024, Lego released the set, Dungeons & Dragons: Red Dragon's Tale, retailing at $359.99. As with many recent sets, the high price tag attracted some criticism. Lego Ideas sets in particular have been jumping up in price, due in part to their growing size. Corfmat's Polaroid set is one of the more reasonably priced ones, retailing for $79.99, while a replica of Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* sells for $169.99, and the smartphone-playable Grand Piano set goes for $399.99.

Still, the value to the home builders who get to see their creations come to life is priceless. "For anyone thinking of uploading an idea—go for it, and remember, the most important thing is to have fun," said Campbell, whose $149.99 *Jaws* set includes the famed *Orca* boat, minifigures for the film's three protagonists (Brody, Hooper, and Quint), and, of course, the shark. "That's what Lego—and life in general—is all about!" ◻

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The Magic of Lego

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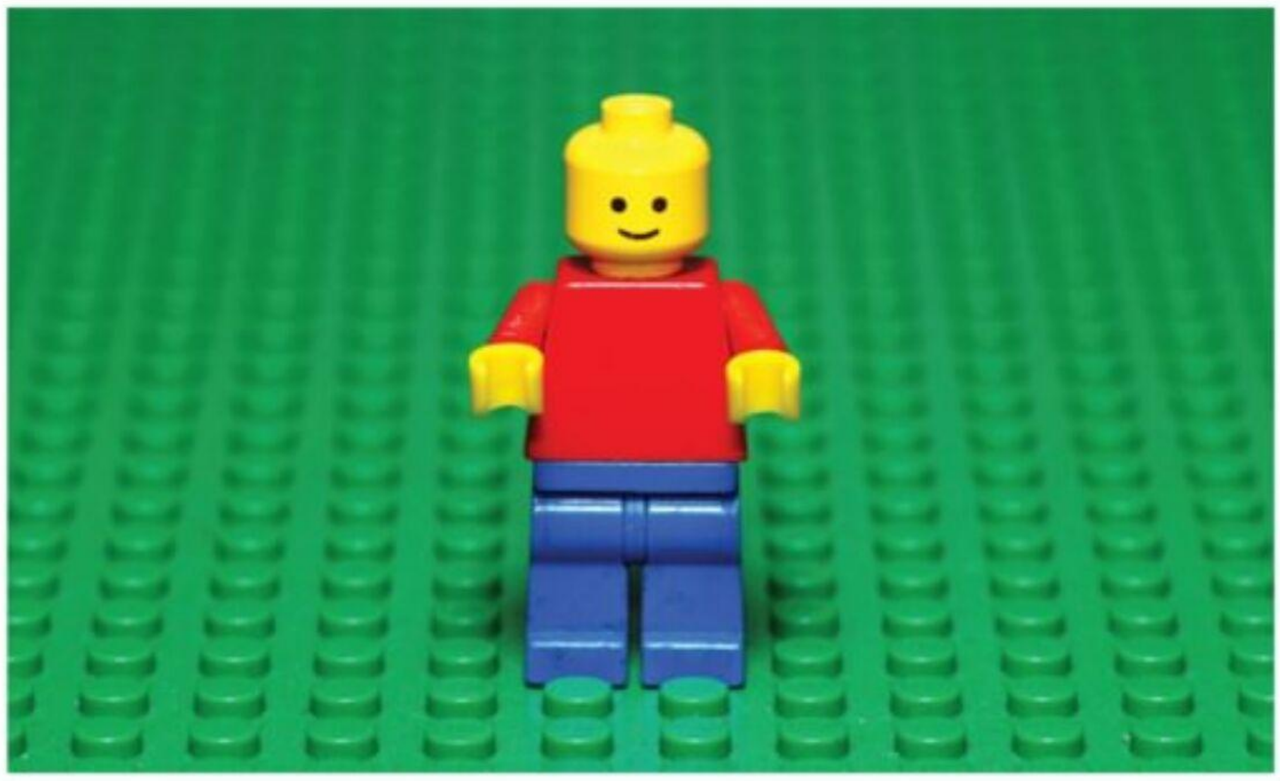

There are billions of minifigures in circulation globally.

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Jhett Thompson

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A Towering Tribute

In December 2017, a massive tower made out of Lego was built in Tel Aviv in honor of Omer Sayag, an 8-year-old boy who had died of cancer a few years earlier and loved to play with the building toys. Half a million bricks were used to create the landmark, which stands 35.95 meters high (117 feet, 11 inches) and is believed to be the tallest Lego structure in the world.

Everything Is Awesome with Lego

Since its introduction 75 years ago, Lego's simple system of interlocking plastic bricks has revolutionized the way we play and even think. The ubiquitous toys continue to encourage creativity and imagination.